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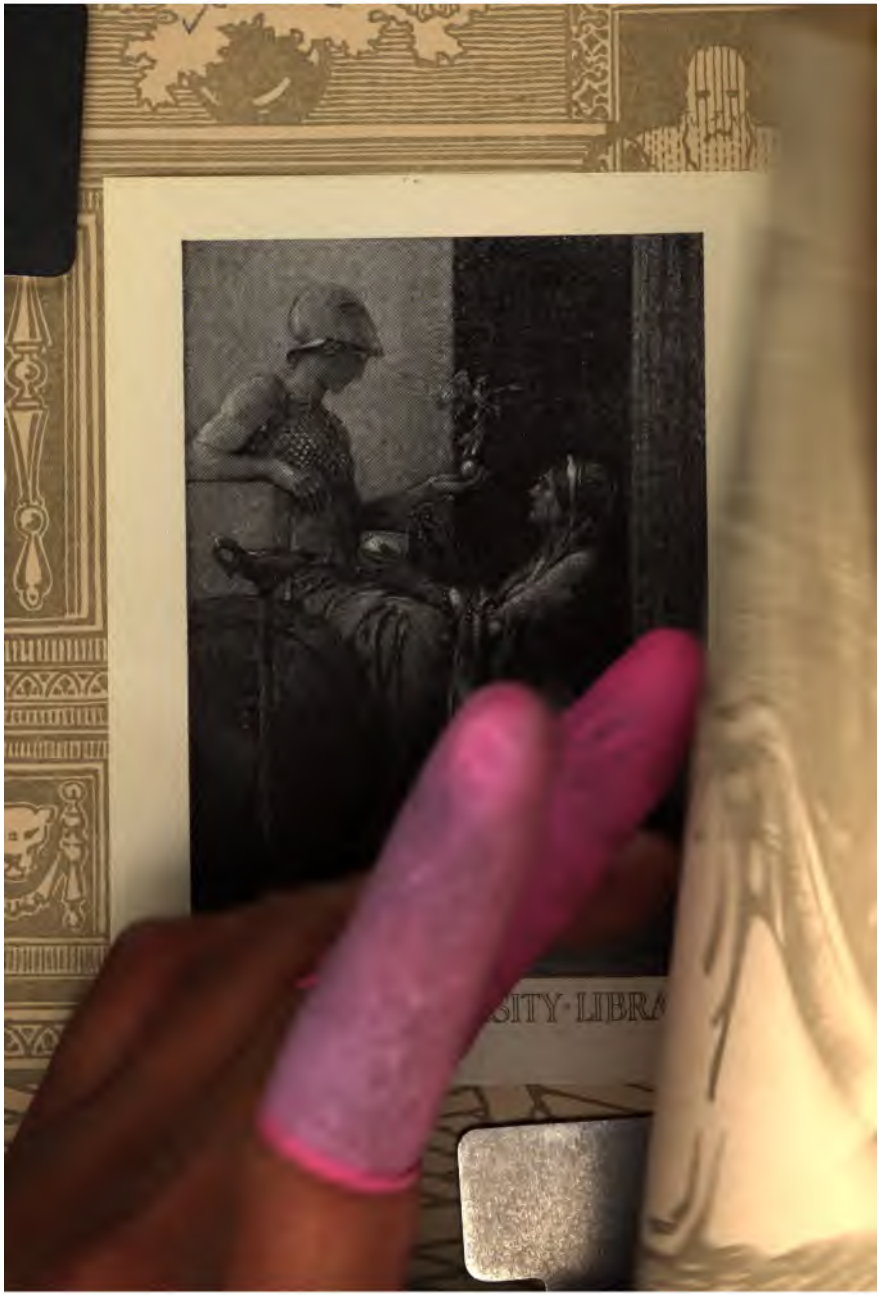

The King darted toward her.

THE ROMANCES OF

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

OLYMPE DE CLÈVES

Volume Two

The Regency Romances

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XXXVI.

HOW BANNIÈRE BECAME A DRAGOON IN THE MAILLY REGIMENT.

BANNIÈRE, deserted by Olympe, passed the second night after his arrest at Lyons upon the straw pallet of his dungeon, rolling and twisting about, and beating his head against the wall.

There are sufferings which the most practised pen will never attempt to describe, because such a pen knows that description has its limits, while grief has none.

The next morning, crushed and ground and bleeding, he had fallen into that sort of lethargy which resembles sleep much as death resembles repose.

Toward eight o'clock, through the cloud which weighed upon his mind and veiled his intellect, he thought that he heard the door of his cell open and saw several men approach him.

Soon a sensation altogether material helped to draw him from his torpid state.

He felt that he was being vigorously shaken; he opened his eyes, cast an expressionless glance around him, and with a mighty effort succeeded in making out what was going on.

Two dragoons, leaning over him, were shaking him with all their strength to arouse him; while a brigadier who stood in front of him, seeing that their efforts had no result, ordered them after every fruitless shake to shake harder, and that in the same tone and the same

phlegmatic air with which he would have conducted the manual of arms.

Bannière was so annoyed by the shaking that he made an effort to recover his voice equal to that he had made to recover his sight, and succeeded in articulating a few words.

"What do you want with me?" he asked.

"Brigadier," said the dragoons, "he has spoken."

"Yes," replied the brigadier; "but I did not understand what he said."

"No more did we," said the dragoons. "Hallo, there, friend!" they shouted, beginning their shaking again; "repeat, if you please, what you just said. The officer did n't hear, nor did we."

"I asked what you want with me," Bannière repeated in a die-away voice.

"Brigadier," said the two soldiers, "he asks what we want."

"*Pardieu!* I heard him," said the brigadier; "I am not deaf."

Then he turned to Bannière.

"What do we want? We want in the first place, comrade," said he, "to set you on your feet if possible, then take you to the barracks, then put on your back a uniform like ours, then teach you to ride, then instruct you in the sabre and carbine drill,— in short, to make a pretty dragoon of you."

"Make a pretty dragoon of me," repeated Bannière, wondering vaguely what the words meant.

"That is to say, as far as it 's possible," added the dier, who, as he saw Bannière's bruised and bloody tenance, did not seem to form an extremely flatter- opinion of his future companion's physique, and equently did not wish, as they said in the regiment,

to promise him more butter than he could spread on his bread.

"Ah, yes," muttered Bannière, "sure enough. I enlisted yesterday in the Mailly dragoons." He added with a sigh: "I had forgotten it."

"The devil!" exclaimed the brigadier, "you have a short memory apparently, comrade; look out, — that 's a serious defect in the military profession. There is a little article in the code on that subject; I recommend you to study it."

Bannière made no reply; he had relapsed into the gloomy reverie from which the repeated and progressively more violent shakings of the soldiers had aroused him for an instant; it is more than probable that he did not hear a word of what the brigadier said.

That was a great misfortune.

However, they got Bannière upon his feet, and once on his feet he could walk; and once under way, he was soon outside the walls; once outside the walls, he breathed the fresh air, and then his faculties gradually returned.

He was a dragoon.

But he was no longer a Jesuit.

They were taking him to the barracks.

But they had no motive for confining him there.

He would leave the barracks, we will not say some day or other, but some hour or other.

He would leave them probably even before nightfall; he would go to La Catalane, and compel her, willy-nilly, to give him the ring; then he would go to Olympe, and however obstinate she might be, he would prove his innocence.

But if he could not satisfy her, he would blow out his brains at her feet, and all would be over.

This little plan, irrevocably determined on in Ban-

nière's mind, gave much strength to his legs and elasticity to his arms.

He had a momentary idea of using this latter quality to overturn the two soldiers who were walking beside him, and then to bring his legs into play and lose himself in one of those labyrinths of streets where it is impossible to follow a man. But he reflected that the alarm would be given at once, and that he could not fail to be retaken before he had paid to La Catalane and Olympe the double visit he was contemplating.

It was better to pay those two visits first, and trust to chance for the rest.

So Bannière shook his head as if to drive away these foolishly premature ideas, and with a more tranquil countenance kept on toward the barracks.

He was almost smiling when he arrived there. The clocks were striking nine as he entered.

The barracks were at one end of a great square courtyard which was used for the regimental drills and manœuvring.

At the moment of Bannière's arrival the regiment was engaged in going through the drill on foot. We believe we have already said that the dragoons had the privilege of belonging to both the cavalry and infantry arms of the service.

Before the enemy, and under fire, every horse-dragoon was a cavalryman; but when his horse was slain, he changed temporarily into the infantry, and wielded a musket in place of his sabre.

The regiment then was going through the foot-drill.

The two dragoons and the brigadier conducted Bannière to the armory. As a man must be at least five feet four and at most five feet six to belong to the dragoons, the iforms made upon that basis were never too long or

too short. It sometimes happened, however, that they were too broad or too scant.

The regimental tailor surveyed Bannière, and said very knowingly,—

"I know what will fit this rascal, as if I had his measure. Make him wash his face, and have his hair cut, and then send him here. I 'll look out for the rest."

Bannière went down into the courtyard, washed his face at the fountain, and submitted his head to the shears, wherewith his locks were clipped according to the rules in five minutes.

Then he went and put on his uniform; and when that was on his back, it was agreed that Bannière really made, as the brigadier had ventured to predict, a very pretty dragoon.

Bannière, absorbed as he was in more serious matters, did not fail to cast a sidelong glance upon the fragment of a mirror, nailed against the wall, which the dandies of the regiment used when they put the last touch to their toilet.

This piece of broken mirror was responsible for the vanished tranquillity of many Lyonnais beauties.

Bannière, then, cast a glance in its direction, and saw, to his great satisfaction, that the uniform was by no means unbecoming to him, whence he derived the hope that having won Olympe's heart in his Jesuit garb, he might have a fair prospect of winning it back again in the brilliant uniform of a dragoon.

There was always that haunting spectre of Monsieur de Mailly behind all Bannière's dreams.

Olympe had told him, as a proof that she was no longer his, that she had returned to her former lover; but might she not have said it in a moment of anger to repay him for the injury he had done her?

Besides, he had himself told her that he was a coward, like every man who truly loves, and who is ready to sacrifice everything, even his honor, to his love.

Oh, well! if Olympe had done as she said, it would be for him to forgive, when he had proved that he had never deceived her; for then he would be the innocent and she the guilty one; and then, oh! then how gladly he would forgive her!

He had reached that point in his forgiving impulse when his brigadier instructor put a gun in his hand, and stationed him among the new recruits who were learning to charge in twelve time.

Bannière passed an hour carrying arms and presenting arms, after which he was told that he was free to dispose of himself as he chose until noon, when he would receive his first lesson in horsemanship.

Bannière asked the brigadier if it would be safe for him to go boldly into the city and defy the Jesuits.

The brigadier replied that under the safeguard of his Majesty's uniform he might be absolutely without apprehension, — that he could safely go up to the very windows of their college, and make the most irritating and contemptuous gestures to the very faces of the black-robed gentry.

Bannière did not wait to be told twice; he saluted his superior, and with his sword under his arm, and his helmet slightly tilted over one ear, he walked across the courtyard to the outer gate, the topographical situation of which he examined with great care, and heedless of observation.

XXXVII.

HOW BANNIÈRE CALLED UPON LA CATALANE, AND FOUND THE HAIRDRESSER THERE, AND WHAT TOOK PLACE.

But, as we know, Bannière's purpose in going out was not purely and simply to examine the architecture of the barracks gate.

His purpose was, first of all, to go to La Catalane, recover the ruby, and ascertain how that ruby came into her possession.

He had stormed and raged inwardly ever since the morning, as we have said; his first thought had been to gain his freedom at all hazards, so that he might effect a happy solution of this terrible episode which had wrought such frightful disaster to him; but he had thought better of it, and had chafed at the bit during the two hours consumed by his toilet and his lesson in the manual.

All this, as may well be imagined, had not failed to exasperate him still more against the cause of all his trouble.

And so, as soon as he had turned the corner of the barracks, he bent his steps toward the theatre, in the neighborhood of which La Catalane lived.

Notwithstanding his great haste, however, he stopped at an armorer's to purchase a pistol, powder, and balls. They cost him two louis, which he took from the hundred louis contained in the purse Olympe had handed him, and which, upon reflection, he had concluded not to cast aside, as they might be very serviceable to him.

The pistol bought and loaded, Bannière put it in his pocket and resumed his way toward La Catalane's dwelling.

It was not simply as a means of threatening, not as a mere weapon of intimidation, that he had provided himself with the pistol; by no means. As the moment of his meeting with that woman drew nearer, Bannière's cheeks grew paler, his lips were closed more tightly, and his decision became more fixed to force the proof of his innocence from her, and if she refused, to blow her brains out.

This decision did not impart a very loverlike expression to his features as he knocked at La Catalane's door.

It was the hairdresser who answered his knock.

As he was reasonably sure that this creature was familiar with all that had taken place, he was not sorry that chance had served him so well as to bring the two together at that time.

The hairdresser recoiled a few steps as she saw who it was, and thereby enabled Bannière to step quickly into the hall; and when he had done so, he closed and locked the door behind him.

"*Jésus Dieu!*" cried the hairdresser, "what does this dragoon want of us?"

Bannière understood that it was not politic to alarm his prey at the outset; so he contorted his features into a ghastly smile, as he said,—

"What! dear Madame, don't you recognize me?"

"*Mon Dieu!* it's Monsieur Bannière," ejaculated the hairdresser. "No, no, no, I did not recognize you."

"What! you don't know your friends?" said Bannière, imparting the mildest note that he could manage to his voice.

"Oh, but you have a fierce look!"

"It 's the costume which gives me that appearance. But a word with you, my girl."

"What is it, Monsieur Bannière?"

"Is La Catalane at home?"

"Why, yes; oh, she will be very glad."

"Why so?"

"Why, to see you. She is very well disposed toward you, my indifferent gallant."

"Bah!" said Bannière, "you 're making game of me."

"No, upon my word! Besides," she added, with a cynical smile, "you can assure yourself of the truth of what I say no later than this very minute."

"Oh, well, perhaps we will ascertain about that! Oh, hairdresser of my heart, just take me to her."

"Why, you know where she is, — in her boudoir."

Since her dealings with the Abbé d'Hoirac, La Catalane had a boudoir.

"No matter! do you show me the way nevertheless," replied Bannière.

The woman saw no objection to that course, and she preceded Bannière up the dark stairway.

Suddenly a bright light streamed into the hall; the hairdresser had opened the door of the boudoir, and Bannière could see La Catalane stretched out luxuriously upon that article of furniture whose indiscreet disclosures made the reputation of Crébillon *fils*.

"Look, Madame," said the hairdresser, "it 's Monsieur Bannière."

Bannière entered in the wake of his guide, and closed and locked the door of the boudoir as he had done with the street door.

"Monsieur Bannière? Where is he?" asked La

Catalane, who did not recognize him in his new costume any more readily than her confederate had done.

"Here he is, in military rig. Just see how it becomes him; only it seems to me that it gives him a terribly fierce look."

At this moment Bannière, having finished what he was doing, and having put the key of the boudoir in his pocket for greater security, turned toward La Catalane.

He was pale no longer; he was livid.

La Catalane shuddered at the expression of his eyes.

"Oh, yes, very fierce indeed," said she, rising. "Pray, what's the matter, Monsieur Bannière?"

Bannière walked up to her with knitted brow, his breath hissing between his clenched teeth.

Without noticing her question, "Your hand," said he.

La Catalane slowly raised her right hand, murmuring in deadly terror, —

"*Mon Dieu!* what do you want?"

Bannière seized the hand she extended, and examined one by one the rings with which the fingers were laden.

Monsieur de Mailly's ruby was not on that hand.

"The other!" he said.

"*Jésus!* he is mad," muttered the hairdresser.

Bannière took the left hand as he had taken the right, by the wrist, and had scarcely glanced at it when his eyes shone.

He had recognized the ruby he had sold to Jacob the Jew.

"Oh," he cried, "it's true; there it is!"

"What?" asked La Catalane, trembling like a leaf.

But Bannière replied to her questions only by propounding questions of his own.

"Where did you steal that ruby?" he demanded.

"What! Steal!" cried La Catalane, attempting to assume an air of righteous indignation.

"Where did you steal that ruby, I say?" repeated Bannière, tapping the floor with his foot.

As he put the question, he squeezed her wrist so hard that the poor woman groaned with pain.

"Help!" cried the hairdresser, "help! murder!"

Bannière looked at her over his shoulder, and remarked without loosing his hold of La Catalane,—

"Come, a little less noise there!"

But as the tone in which the words were uttered was anything but reassuring, the hairdresser, instead of making less noise, redoubled her shrieks and gestures of despair.

Bannière released La Catalane's wrist, leaped upon the hairdresser, seized her by the neck with his left hand, and as he dragged her toward La Catalane, drew the pistol from his pocket, and held the barrel against her chest.

"Come," said he, with stern decision, "I have no time to lose in lamentations and jeremiads. About that ring, where did it come from, who gave it to you? Speak, or I 'll kill you!"

La Catalane appreciated that her life hung by a thread.

"The Abbé d'Hoirac," said she.

"Then you are Abbé d'Hoirac's mistress?"

"But —"

"Then you are Abbé d'Hoirac's mistress?"

"Yes."

"Very well. You are going to give me that ring."

"But —"

"First of all, you are going to give me that ring."

"Here it is."

"And now you are going to state in writing that you are the Abbé d'Hoirac's mistress, and that he gave you the ring."

"But — "

"Thousand devils!"

"I will write whatever you wish," cried La Catalane, falling upon her knees, so terrified was she by the expression of Bannière's face.

The hairdresser meanwhile, to whom Bannière had paid no further attention than to tighten his grasp upon her neck as La Catalane's hesitations increased his rage to madness, — the hairdresser was writhing and twisting in his hands, like a serpent in the clutches of an eagle.

He saw at last that unless he let her go, he should strangle her. Moreover he had to hunt up writing-materials for La Catalane to make her statement.

He unscrewed the vice a little.

"Oh, let me go! oh, let me go!" muttered the hairdresser, indistinctly.

"If I let you go," said Bannière, "will you be wise and hold your tongue?"

"I will not make a sound," said the woman.

"Very well," said Bannière.

He relaxed his hold upon her, and she fell at full length upon the floor, begging for mercy.

Then he went to a little round table upon which his eye fell; and there he found pen, ink, and paper all ready for use, as if in anticipation of his visit.

He took the whole up bodily, and set it down before La Catalane.

"Now write," said he.

She had no inclination to resist, but her hand trembled so that it took her some moments to steady herself.

"Come," said Bannière, "calm yourself; I will wait."

He stood playing with the trigger of his pistol, cocking and uncocking it with a sinister, threatening sound, which was more efficacious in restoring La Catalane's faculties than all the salts and cold water in the world.

She took the pen and said, with a glance at Bannière:

"Dictate, and I will write."

"No," said Bannière, "you might claim, perhaps, that I had influenced you to say what I want. Write it yourself: only tell the truth, lucidly and as concisely as possible."

La Catalane wrote:—

"I declare, as being the solemn truth, that the ruby ring which I this day deliver to Monsieur Bannière was not given to me by Monsieur Bannière, but by the Abbé d'Hoirac, my lover."

"Good!" said Bannière, following with his eyes the words as they were written,—"good! Now sign it."

La Catalane signed with a long-drawn sigh.

"And now the ring," continued Bannière.

Another sigh, deeper still; but it was no time for haggling,—she gave him the ring.

Bannière examined it closely to see if it was really the same ruby, and having recognized it beyond question, put it on his little finger.

"Now," said he, "as I am no thief, and as it is no part of my purpose to do you any real injury, take this."

Taking a handful of louis from his pocket, he threw them in La Catalane's face, and darted from the boudoir.

At the door he stopped to listen; he feared that one or the other of the women might rush to the window to call the guard, and have him arrested when he went out.

But they were picking up the louis Bannière had thrown at them, to which the hairdresser, who was half

strangled, claimed to have as undeniable a right as La Catalane, who was half dead with fear.

Bannière, seeing that he had naught to fear in that direction, leaped down the stairs and into the street, and ran off as fast as his legs would carry him, in the direction of Rue Montyon, where, as our readers will remember, Olympe resided.

XXXVIII.

HOW BANNIÈRE CEASED TO BE A DRAGOON IN THE MAILLY REGIMENT.

BANNIÈRE arrived, quite breathless, before the house so familiar to his eyes and his heart, and in which he had passed such blissful and such unhappy hours.

Everything was closed except a single window on the first floor,— the window of Olympe's boudoir.

Bannière's heart sank within him at the aspect of the house, which resembled a tomb, except that the solitary open window seemed to indicate that every spark of life was not yet extinct.

He seized the knocker, and pounded away furiously.

He thought at first that he was to receive no reply; his impatience lengthened seconds to minutes, and minutes to hours.

At length he heard a step approaching the door cautiously.

He knocked again, as there seemed to be some hesitation in the step.

"Who is there?" asked a woman's voice.

"It 's I, Claire,— I."

"Who are you?"

"I am Bannière. Don't you know my voice, pray?"

"Oh, Monsieur Bannière, why have you come here?" asked Claire, without opening the door.

"Why have I come here!"

"Yes, I ask you that."

"Why, I have come home; I have come to see Olympe. I have come to prove to her that her suspicions were unfounded; I have come to tell her that I still love her."

"But Mademoiselle Olympe is no longer here, Monsieur Bannière."

"Olympe not here!"

"No, Monsieur Bannière; she has gone."

"Gone where?"

"To Paris."

"When?"

"At two o'clock this morning."

"With whom?" asked Bannière, as the color left his cheeks.

"With Monsieur de Mailly."

Bannière uttered a cry of anguish, as if a knife had pierced his heart. Feeling as if he were going to fall, he clung to the knocker.

Almost immediately a thought flashed through his mind.

"It 's not true!" he said.

"What! not true!" cried Claire, offended that such a slur should be cast upon her veracity.

"Olympe is in there!"

"I swear that she is not."

"She does n't want to see me, and has taught you your lesson."

"No, Monsieur Bannière, as truly as there is only one God in heaven!"

"I say that you lie!" cried Bannière.

"Oh, the idea!" said the maid; "I lie! Come in, Monsieur Bannière, and see for yourself."

Whereupon Claire, sure of her facts, majestically opened the door, and gave passage to the dragoon.

The liberty accorded him of entering the house, after

the long discussion through the door, proved to Bannière that there was no hope for him.

But he went in, nevertheless, gloomy and crushed; his purpose was, not to see Olympe again, for he was convinced that she was not there, but to see at least the room in which she had lived.

Alas! it was easy to see that she had indeed departed. At every step Bannière found some trace of her hasty flight. The salon was crowded with boxes which Mademoiselle Claire had been occupied in packing.

He went from the salon into the bedroom.

He was suffocated with grief.

The bedroom was still redolent with subtle perfume,— the same which La Catalane had successfully employed to assist in deceiving the Abbé d'Hoirac.

Bannière knew it so well, alas! — he had been intoxicated with its fumes so many times, by her side from whom he was separated forever!

He fell on his knees beside the untouched bed, took in his arms the lace-trimmed pillow upon which Olympe was wont to lay her head, and covered it with kisses.

Deep sobs burst from his overcharged heart, mingled with sighs and tears and inarticulate sounds.

Claire observed his great sorrow compassionately. Women are women all the world over; that is to say, they have no mercy for the ills which they themselves are responsible for,— with regard to such they are pitiless, — but they are very compassionate for those ills which other women bring upon us.

We must remember, too, that Claire had once thought Bannière a fine fellow; and veritable grief, especially when caused by unhappy love, always adds to a man's attractions in a woman's eyes.

"Oh, Monsieur Bannière," said she, "you must not

give way thus! After all, Mademoiselle Olympe is not dead."

"Claire, dear Claire," cried the dragoon, recalled from hell by this consoling voice. "Oh, you are kind, indeed you are! You will tell me where she is, won't you, so that I may follow her and find her?"

"I would do so with much pleasure, Monsieur, but I do not know myself where Mademoiselle is."

"What! you don't know where she is?"

"No."

"But you are packing her trunks."

"True; but I am to await a letter from her to tell me where to send them."

"When ought the letter to arrive?"

"I don't know."

"But at least you know whether she started for Paris or for Marseilles?"

"Oh, for Paris, Monsieur, I am sure."

"Are you perfectly sure, my good Claire?"

"Yes."

"What makes you sure?"

"Because, as they were leaving, Monsieur de Mailly said to the postilion, 'The Paris road, by the Nivernais.'"

"Monsieur de Mailly!" exclaimed Bannière. "Oh, then he really was with her!"

"As for that, Monsieur Bannière, I should not think of concealing it from you."

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* Claire, what shall I do? what will become of me?"

"I don't think it is for me to give advice to a determined fellow so deep in love as you, Monsieur Bannière."

"Oh, if I only knew where I could hear of her!"

"Why, you can always hear of her at the Hôtel de Mailly."

"You are right, Claire; there I can surely learn where Olympe is, — at all events, by following Monsieur de Mailly. Oh, Claire, Claire, my child, you have saved my life!"

In his joy, he put his hand in his pocket, pulled out several louis, and put them in Claire's hand, kissed the pillow once more most fervently, and rushed out of the house smiling.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* what an idiot I was! Of course I can learn everything at the Hôtel de Mailly."

But it was a hundred and twenty leagues from Rue Montyon to the Hôtel de Mailly. How was Bannière to manage that distance?

The question seemed not to cause the dragoon the least anxiety, for he hurried off toward the barracks with an almost placid expression on his face.

He arrived just as the cavalry drill was about to begin.

The brigadier-instructor was waiting, biting his mustache, and holding a long whip in his hand.

He was inclined to grumble, as his custom was; but as he glanced obliquely at the clock, he saw that Bannière was a minute ahead of time instead of a minute behind, so he had nothing to grumble about.

"Come here, comrade!" the brigadier said to him.

"Here I am, brigadier."

"Have you ever ridden?"

"Never."

"So much the better," said the brigadier, "for in that case you have no bad habits to unlearn."

Why did Bannière, who was as we have seen a passably good horseman, reply that he had never ridden?

Because he had his reasons for the falsehood, no doubt. Bannière was not troubled with such scruples as were

eternally tormenting Champmeslé and laying snares for his feet.

The horses were on hand.

"Bring the trotting horse first," said the brigadier.

Turning to Bannière, he said: "You understand that you will be taught first to ride a trotting-horse, then a runner, and then a jumper."

"Why not begin at once with the runner?" asked Bannière, who seemed anxious to learn.

"Ah!" said the brigadier, "because you must learn to trot before learning to gallop."

"Very well," said the recruit; "then the runner, as you call him, will gallop if desired."

"He goes like the wind."

"And for a long while?"

"By riding judiciously, one can do twenty leagues in four hours upon his back."

"The devil!" exclaimed Bannière; "a fellow must be an expert to ride such a horse."

"Oh, that makes no difference; for when the rider falls off, he stops."

"That 's very convenient," rejoined Bannière. "Well, brigadier, let 's see the trotter."

"Aha! you are in a great hurry, comrade."

"Well, you see, brigadier, that I detest the Jesuit ceremonial as much as I adore the military drill."

"Good," said the brigadier; "I see that I was rightly informed about you, and that with time and good will, we can make something of you."

"*Dame!* I hope so," said Bannière.

The brigadier made a sign, and the trotter was led out; he showed Bannière how to gather up the reins, how to seize the mane with the left hand, and how with three springs he should be in the saddle.

We say "should be," because after his three springs Bannière was not in the saddle at all. He had lifted himself up; but after resting his stomach on the pommel for an instant, waving his right arm and left leg about wildly, much as a swimmer does, he fell back on the ground, amid peals of laughter from his comrades.

"Let 's try again," said the brigadier, seriously.

Bannière did try again, and was more fortunate the second time. After some minutes of violent effort, he at last tumbled into the saddle.

"That 's better," said the brigadier; "but we will begin again, so that we may get it perfectly."

"Begin again it is," said Bannière, bravely; "for I am like you, brigadier, upon my word! I take some pride in it."

The dragoons who were watching the lesson began to laugh.

"Silence!" said the brigadier. "The poor boy wants to learn at least," he added, "and I 'm not sure that I could say as much of all of you."

Bannière made a third attempt, amid profound silence, and this time he came out of it without discredit.

"Ah!" he exclaimed triumphantly, when he was in the saddle, "here I am, brigadier."

"Very good, dragoon!" was the reply; "now turn the toe of your boot in, press the saddle with your knees, — the knees, dragoon, are the true horseman's support — Are you doing as I tell you, my boy?"

"I think so, brigadier."

"Well then, houp!"

He aimed a blow with the whip at the steed, who proceeded to justify his appellation by starting off at a fast trot.

Although Bannière was, as we have said, a fairly good

horseman, the gait of the horse upon which he was mounted had the advantage of being so hard that one could from behind see the sky between the rider's body and the saddle at every step.

For a moment it occurred to him to ride English fashion, — rising on the stirrups, that is, — but he reflected that he would betray himself if he did so, and he let himself be shaken up like a bag of walnuts, swaying from side to side.

Again he reflected that if he exaggerated the insecurity of his seat, the galloping lesson might be postponed till the next day; and as he was in a great hurry to pass from the trotter to the runner, he regained his equilibrium gradually, and ended by riding sufficiently well to draw forth words of encouragement from the brigadier, who at last uttered the words so eagerly awaited, —

"Very good; now, the runner."

Bannière was on the point of leaping from his horse at a single bound; but that, he thought, would be as culpable a piece of imprudence as the other he had so nearly committed, so he let himself down as awkwardly as possible to the ground.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed the brigadier, losing a little of his enthusiasm for the recruit; "the next time, my friend, we must dismount in better form than that."

"Shall I try again, brigadier?" said Bannière, in his humblest tone.

"No, it's not worth while; we will attend to that to-morrow. The runner."

The runner was led out. He was a superb blooded horse, with legs as slender as spindles, and muscles of steel.

He stretched out his graceful and intelligent head toward Bannière, snuffed at him, and neighed.

"Good!" muttered Bannière, "good! before long, I 'll make you neigh."

"Come, come," said the brigadier, "let 's not lose any time; to the saddle, and see if you can mount this one better than you dismounted from the other."

"Oh, brigadier," said Bannière, "it 's nothing at all to mount, as you will see."

Indeed, at the third spring, Bannière was firmly seated in the saddle.

"Not bad," said the brigadier.

"Tell me, brigadier," said Bannière, who seemed encouraged by the praise, "we don't go too fast at first, do we? I have never ridden at a gallop."

The brigadier began to laugh, and touched the horse so lightly with the whip that one could see that he had regard for Bannière's suggestion.

Yet the horse, notwithstanding his moderation, set off at a great pace, perhaps urged on by invisible pricks of the spur.

"Oh, brigadier, brigadier!" cried Bannière; "what 's your horse doing? Stop him, I am falling. Brigadier, brigadier, your horse is bolting with me! Whoa! whoa!"

Bannière, without letting go the rein, crouched down on the mane of his steed, who, after making the circuit of the inner court amid the shrieks of laughter of the whole regiment, darted out at the gate and into the street, as if he needed more room to satisfy his ambition for speed.

The brigadier and the soldiers, still laughing, ran to the gate, and saw Bannière in the distance clinging to his horse, and crying in a most doleful voice,—

"Brigadier, help, help! I am going to fall! Whoa, whoa, whoa!"

This lasted until the horse had disappeared at the

corner of the street; then the horseman let go the mane, gathered up the reins, and leaning like Hyppolite over his horse's neck, he emitted a little whistling sound, which, seconded by vigorous spur-play, increased the speed of his mount twofold.

Meanwhile the brigadier and the soldiers were laughing as if they would burst. They were completely taken in by Bannière's stratagem.

The boy had not been a Jesuit ten years, and an actor twelve months, to no purpose.

XXXIX.

HOW BANNIÈRE'S HORSE RAN UNTIL HE STOPPED; THE WORTHY PERSONS WHOSE ACQUAINTANCE OUR HERO MADE IN A CERTAIN TOWN, THE NAME OF WHICH HAS ESCAPED US.

THE horse was a fast runner, and Bannière realized the need of speed. Consequently, when the horse gave signs of weariness and slackened his pace, Bannière would drive the spurs into his sides up to the rowels, whereupon the spirited animal would make off again at a gallop. The result was that man and horse covered a long distance in a short time without stopping for breath.

Two hours out of Lyons, however, Bannière was compelled to rest for a few moments, for his own sake as well as his gallant steed's. These few moments he employed in discussing a bottle of generous Burgundy, while his horse was regaled with a double ration of oats in which he poured what there was left of his bottle.

In the two hours he had made almost eight leagues. Man refreshed and horse fed, the man remounted the horse and resumed his journey.

The wine and oats had a miraculous effect; the beast had the devil in him, and his feet hardly touched the earth. One would have said it was the steed of Faust on his way to the witches' vigil.

To be sure, one would have looked in vain for Mephistopheles on the crupper; but, visible or invisible, every man has his Mephistopheles galloping beside him.

Bannière's Mephistopheles was at this moment a combination of every human passion, — in the first place, love for Olympe, more violent than ever; secondly, a profound hatred for Monsieur de Mailly, which grew more and more bitter as the moments passed, for he imagined, poor fellow! that Monsieur de Mailly during all this time was at Olympe's side; then from time to time another emotion crept into his heart, which though something less exalted than the two noble passions, love and hatred, which form the basis of so many thrilling tragedies and exciting dramas, is no less importunate.

We refer to that baser emotion which is called *fear*.

Bannière was afraid of being followed and overtaken. It was the second time that he had fled for his liberty, — the first time from the Jesuits, the second from the dragoons. But the first time Olympe was the companion of his flight; and this time he was alone, save for the invisible Mephistopheles which kept whispering in his ear, —

"Haste! Bannière, haste! and you will overtake Olympe and Monsieur de Mailly; and you will escape from the dragoons as you escaped from the Jesuits. Haste! Bannière, haste!"

Every word which fell from this spirit who was urging Bannière on was translated into a vigorous dig of the spur.

At last the horse, utterly exhausted, came to a standstill with trembling legs, covered with foam, and gasping for breath.

Our embryo cavalryman had covered in five hours fifteen honest leagues, equal to twenty-five leagues at least by post.

Bannière was earnestly engaged in conversation with his Mephistopheles when his horse stopped, and had not

noticed that he had reached quite a large village, and that the dwellers therein, standing at their doors or sitting on benches against the house-fronts, were gazing with an air of selfish well-fed comfort, which they were at no pains to conceal, at the dust-begrimed horseman and foam-covered steed, both of whom seemed in dire distress, while they, worthy bumpkins, lazily turning their heads without moving their bodies, were entirely free from care, happy and motionless, enjoying to the full that variety of well-being which the Latin poets, an eminently slothful race, understood so well.

Witness Virgil's shepherd returning thanks to Augustus for the repose which he owes to him; and witness Lucretius congratulating himself upon being able to sit calmly on shore, while the angry sea is tossing ships and sailors about upon its mountainous waves.

When the horse stopped, and Bannière succeeded in opening his eyes, blinded with dust and suffused with blood, he saw in the first place the large village of which we have spoken, which consisted of a single street, at the farther end of which the country was open again. Then, when he directed his glance from the more distant objects to those nearer at hand, he saw a man with a pleasant, rosy countenance holding his horse by the rein, and another, less florid in appearance, holding the stirrup on the dismounting side. At the same time a voice which assumed to speak in gracious tones said at his ear, —

"Good-day, Monsieur le Dragon!"

"Oho!" said Bannière, still somewhat confused, "are they speaking to me, I wonder?"

But a moment's reflection was sufficient to assure him that the voice could not be bidding good-day to any other than himself, for the simple reason that he was

alone on the road, and there probably was not another dragoon within ten leagues.

He also observed that his horse had halted just at the door of one of those enormous inns which dotted the main roads of the France of former days, and which gave forth an odor of grain for quadrupeds and baked meats for bipeds that could be smelt a league away.

The spit was turning; chickens and partridges were browning before the fire, while the sweet-smelling hay was thrown down from the mow, and the teeth of the thirty horses in the stable were crunching the beautiful black oats.

"Good-day, Monsieur le Dragon," said somebody.

"Good-day, Messieurs," replied Bannière, trying to impart to his voice an accent of courteous gratitude, as he saw the two men offering their services.

"Oh, what a handsome dragoon!" said a third voice, which by its gentler modulations Bannière recognized as belonging to a person of the female persuasion.

"Devil take me!" thought Bannière, looking about for the proprietress of that charming organ, which, although its words terrified him, struck very softly on his ear. "Devil take me! I must change my rig; I am a little too military to appear in public in this neighborhood."

However he took courage, in that his male interlocutors wore civilian costumes, and that his panegyrist was a pretty girl of some twenty years.

The two civilians were, as we have said, one at his bridle, the other at his horse's side. The pretty girl was standing at the door of the inn. Bannière cast a hasty glance upon his surroundings, and seeing that there was nothing in or about the hostelry which savored of the provost, he alighted with an air of determination.

He was no sooner out of the saddle than his horse was led off to the stable by the hostler, and Bannière allowed himself to be gently impelled toward the dining-room.

There are, as we all know, invisible but irresistible currents which always draw a man in the direction in which he wishes to go. The beast wished to go to the stable and the man to the refectory, and both reached the goals of their respective desires at the same time.

The two civilians, whose demeanor was intended to inspire confidence, accompanied Bannière, as if to do the honors of the establishment; and Bannière, albeit rather surprised at their assiduous attentions, made no resistance.

She of the attractive countenance, in some mysterious way unfathomed by Bannière, perhaps upon fairy wings, vanished from the threshold of the outer door only to reappear upon the threshold of the dining-room.

Being thus guided by heart, eyes, and stomach, Bannière yielded with a good grace.

In the first place he had to undergo a series of inquiries very natural on the part of people who were so lavish of polite attentions; but they all substantially resolved themselves into this one,—

"Where are you going, dragoon?"

"Where am I going?" Bannière replied. "*Pardieu!* that's a simple question; I am going to Paris."

"Pardon! you would do better to go somewhere else."

"It seems that Paris is Monsieur's destination," said one of Bannière's questioners. "I, for my part see no harm in his going to Paris; I come from there, myself."

Bannière thought it was quite time for him to get some idea of the individuals who surrounded him; and while the table was being laid, he made a somewhat careful examination of them, as he was dusting his boots with his handkerchief.

The one who seemed to have some objection to Banière's going to Paris was a little bourgeois of some fifty years, with a red face, plump and well-fed, with short, thick hands; he was dressed in a grayish-brown coat, breeches of the same color, and grayish-blue ribbed stockings.

The other, who was tall with a long, thin neck, wore a plume of feathers over his ear notwithstanding his bourgeois costume. he had long arms, a long nose, a small, dry hand, and a little, round black eye; and in his long nose, if we may be permitted to revert to that feature, there was a peculiar deviation from a straight line, which all people who are afflicted with it ought to have remarked, at once, by the spectacle of orthopedy, for there is no peculiarity of the physiognomy which so [illegible] more obvious.

[illegible] to whom we are indebted for [illegible], was not here at the time at all events, he was not then visited, as that business could not [illegible].

It [illegible] that the man with the long nose and the [illegible] had [illegible] a young [illegible] from left [illegible] was [illegible].

[illegible] was [illegible] thoughts [illegible] neither saw nor [illegible] the great, ugly, [illegible] with [illegible].

[illegible] hanging, [illegible] was thrust [illegible] gilded, [illegible].

[illegible] little black eye [illegible].

as well as the others, that ten or twelve lines should be devoted to drawing her portrait.

To be sure, we romancists never deal with pretty women, and the companion of the man with the plume was very pretty.

However, this is what she was like; take careful note of it.

Slight, fair, and rosy; large eyes of a deep blue shade; mouth well-shaped, smiling often, sometimes pouting, and at such times captivating; sweet little hands, delightful to look upon.

She saw that her turn had come to be examined, and she made a charming courtesy to Bannière.

The conversation became general, and dealt only with commonplace subjects, as is usually the case among people who are not acquainted.

The news of the road, the weather, and the traveller's horse were the principal topics.

Bannière was very reserved upon the first point; he had every conceivable reason for not divulging whence he came

Upon the second he talked freely; he confessed that it was hotter than the devil.

"Not so hot as it is in the Abruzzi, though," interjected the man with the plume.

Why he said "than in the Abruzzi," we shall see very soon.

On the third point, his horse, Bannière was as prolix as Ovid.

This can be easily explained; he had reasons for acting as he did.

We have already explained that he did not care to tell where he came from.

As to the second point, he could not prevent the

weather being what it was, — very hot. He might, to be sure, have discussed the degree of heat, and maintained that it was as hot as in the Abruzzi; but he did not do it, — perhaps because he was of the same opinion as his interlocutor, or because he did not care whether it was so or not.

As to the third, he wanted to sell his horse, which was, like all cavalry horses, branded with a *fleur-de-lis* upon the flank, and was recognizable — that is to say, compromising— wherever he might go.

The man with the blue hose and the man with the plume thereupon began to analyze the beast.

The man with the plume was lost in admiration of his beauty.

"Permit me, nevertheless," said the little man, "to contradict you, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Oho!" thought Bannière. "A marquis, eh? the devil you say!"

The more he looked at him, the more unpleasant did he, the lover of the beautiful, find that extraordinary nose.

"In what particular," said the marquis, "do you find fault with the horse? He is as you see him."

"He is foundered, Monsieur."

"Pretty good!" said Bannière; "if it would not be discourteous, I should tell you that you did n't know what you were talking about."

"Oh, as to that," rejoined the marquis, "I cannot agree with you. I stand up for the animal, which seems to be a very good one, and I am much pleased with him; but to say that Monsieur does n't understand horses! — oh, no! oh, no! I will never say that."

"Nevertheless — " Bannière began.

"Dear dragoon," said the man with the plume, in a

slightly patronizing tone, which went decidedly against Bannière's grain, "Monsieur is a large dealer in silks, who has killed more horses in his travels than your regiment and mine have ever had slain in battle, even though they fought against Prince Eugene and Monsieur de Marlborough."

"Oho! you have a regiment?" said the dragoon.

"That is to say, Monsieur, I am captain in a regiment," replied the marquis, modestly.

"Monsieur le Marquis," said the little blue-stockinged man in Bannière's ear, "is captain in the Abruzzi regiment."

"Ah!" said Bannière, "I see; that is why he said just now, when I remarked that it was hot on the Paris road, 'not so hot as in the Abruzzi'?"

"Exactly."

"I understand, then."

"He's a terrible fellow, of whom you certainly must have heard."

Bannière executed that contortion of the eye and mouth which is supposed to accompany an effort of the memory; but he could not remember.

"What is his name?" he asked.

"The Marquis della Torra."

"No, — no," said Bannière. "The Marquis della Torra? It's the first time I ever heard the name."

"At all events, you know now that he is a captain."

"And a marquis," said Bannière.

"And a marquis," repeated the little silk-merchant.

"So you say that the horse is foundered?" resumed the marquis.

"I am afraid so."

The marquis rang, and a waiter appeared.

"Go to the stable," said the marquis, "and see what Monsieur's horse is doing, and come back and tell me."

In a few minutes the boy returned.

"Well?" the marquis inquired.

"He is feeding," was the reply.

"There, you see!" said Bannière.

"What?" said the little man with the blue stockings.

"A foundered horse does n't eat."

"What 's that?" said the marquis, who seemed to be going over to his companion's opinion; "we have known horses go two or three days, even when badly foundered, when they were of such stock as your horse is, Monsieur."

"Oh, as for the stock," said the little man, returning concession for concession, "he 's of good stock; I saw that at once."

"As I say, they will go along for some days," continued the Marquis della Torra, "breathing hard, and then fall all of a sudden."

"Very well," said the little man; "just take the trouble to come to the stable door, Monsieur le Marquis, and you will see how Monsieur's horse is wheezing."

"What will your regiment say, dragoon," said the marquis, with the air of a superior officer, "when they see what a wreck you have made of your horse, for some little love affair, no doubt? For my own part," he added, becoming all captain, "I have my soldiers flogged when they ruin my horses."

The blood mounted to Bannière's temples, for it seemed to him an extremely impertinent speech, especially in the presence of the young lady aforesaid.

"In France, Monsieur," said he, proudly, "cavaliers are not flogged."

"No," retorted the silk merchant, "they are not ogged, but they are imprisoned."

"The horse is mine, and not the regiment's," said

Bannière, coolly; "it was a present from my father when I enlisted. Therefore I treat my horse as I choose."

"Pardon me," said the merchant, politely. "It is undeniable that if the horse was given you by Monsieur your father, he is yours, as you say, and, being yours, you can do what you please with him."

"Monsieur, excuse me," said the marquis; "seeing you in uniform, I took you for a common soldier, although when I heard your conversation, I at once said to myself, 'A strange soldier this;' and taking you, as I did, for a common soldier, in the kindness of my heart I was somewhat anxious, as I should be, for example, if you were travelling around the country without leave."

"I am quitting the service, Monsieur. I have my discharge."

"Oh, so much the better!" exclaimed the young woman, who had not spoken before, being wholly absorbed in devouring Bannière with inquisitive feminine eyes.

"Indeed, Madame!" said the Marquis della Torra, with a most dignified air.

"Indeed, what?" asked the young woman, with much less assumption.

"In what way does it concern you, pray, whether Monsieur does or does not leave the service?"

"Not at all, Monsieur."

"And yet you said, 'So much the better!'"

"Very possibly."

"You are wrong, Marion; the profession of arms is a noble profession."

In his warlike enthusiasm he waved his plume.

"Well," said Bannière, "noble as it is, I am leaving it, which is equivalent to saying that I should be glad to dispose of my horse."

"Really?" said the captain.

"What use have I for him, I should like to know?" said Bannière, in the tone of a retired bourgeois. "A war-horse is a very good thing for a soldier."

"True, true, upon my faith!" said the Marquis della Torra.

"Indeed, if Monsieur is leaving the service —" said the dealer in silks.

Marion said nothing; she looked at Bannière with an expression which was intended to convey the idea that if he was out of a place and would apply to her, she would find one for him.

"Will you dispose of your coat too?" asked the captain.

"Oh, yes! coat and waistcoat, breeches and boots," said Bannière; "with the greatest pleasure. But what can you do with all those things, Monsieur le Marquis?" he added with a laugh.

"What? Oh, I should like the coat for a pattern for a new uniform. I mean to try to have that of our regiment changed; and I am sure that if the colonel saw your coat —"

"Oh, *pardieu!* it is quite at your service, Monsieur le Marquis," said Bannière.

"How much will you sell it for?"

"I will not sell it."

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"I will exchange it for a civilian's coat. You are tall, so am I; you are thinner than I am, to be sure, but I like a tight fit. You see we can make a trade. Give me any coat whatsoever."

'Whatsoever! Indeed you are very easy to please. coat whatsoever! How sorry I am that my lug- has not arrived! I would have given you my

gray velvet coat with red satin lapels, which is quite new."

"Oh, no, Monsieur, that would have been too much."

"Go to, young man," said the marquis, loftily; "in truth, it would be a fine sight to see a man like myself exchange on even terms with a dragoon. I love to oblige, my dear fellow, and it costs me a hundred thousand crowns a year. However, that is what God has put noblemen in the world for; it is for that that he has made them well-to-do, and captains of regiments."

"Monsieur," murmured Bannière, bowing low, overwhelmed by such elevation of sentiment.

"What a delightful man you are!" ejaculated the merchant, as if he could not restrain his rapturous admiration.

"Indeed, yes," said Bannière.

The young woman gazed abstractedly at a wretched picture hanging on the wall.

"But, unluckily," resumed the captain, "my trunks not having arrived —"

"Well?" said Bannière, inquiringly.

"Why, I have not those coats."

"But," said Bannière, "of course you have another. A man like you is not likely to be short of coats."

"Yes, upon my word! In order to travel more quickly, I left everything behind. I have nothing but a velvet dressing-jacket and a pair of cloth breeches."

"The devil! that 's a night costume, I should say," said Bannière.

"Just that, my dear Monsieur, upon my word."

Bannière looked at the marquis with some astonishment. He was evidently wondering how a man of such importance in the world could start on a journey with no other coat than the one on his back. His eyes wandered from the captain to the merchant.

The latter gentleman thought that he could read in his eyes an inquiry as to the condition of his wardrobe.

"On my faith!" he hastened to say, "I am as badly off as Monsieur le Marquis, not by accident but on principle. I have no coat but this; I never change it. One does not easily forget poor beginnings. Economy, Monsieur, economy!"

"That same economy is the builder of fortunes," said the captain, emphatically. "Besides, if you had two extra coats, you could hardly make one for Monsieur with both of them; he is a third taller than you."

"Let 's see," said Bannière, coming to a decision, "is this nocturnal costume so very absurd?"

"What! absurd!" said the plumed worthy, frowning, and looking askance at Bannière.

"Pardon, Monsieur, I meant to say laughable."

"Laughable, laughable!"

"Why, yes, of course, Monsieur; one is always a laughable object in such a costume," Bannière retorted with some impatience.

"Ah, very well, very well, I understand your meaning," said the marquis, more mildly.

"He 's a very sensitive man," said the merchant in Bannière's ear.

It made but little difference to Bannière; however, he desired to be courteous.

"I hope Monsieur does not think that I wished to be offensive," said he.

"Oh, no! oh no!" said Madame Marion; "don't be alarmed."

'l go and fetch the costume," said the Marquis
:a; "I see that it will be a kind action."
disturb yourself, Monsieur le Marquis," said
ıant; "I will fetch it from your room myself."
e went out.

XL.

HOW, WITHOUT BEING AS NOBLY BORN AS MONSIEUR DE GRAMMONT, BANNIÈRE PLAYED THE SAME GAME AS HE.

ALL these little courteous attentions gave Bannière a very exalted idea of the social position of Monsieur le Marquis.

To induce a rich merchant thus to play second fiddle to a captain, he thought, the captain must be at least a millionaire.

Then he began distractedly, for his heart and thought were still hastening after Olympe, to eye Madame Marion askance, without the least thought of evil, and only to seek some means of repaying her attentions.

The merchant was absent only a sufficient length of time to go upstairs and down; doubtless he was familiar with the marquis's apartment. He brought back the costume in question.

The jacket was of velvet, beyond controversy, — upon that point the Marquis della Torra had not lied; but the velvet was discolored and shiny, and its freshness had long ceased to be a memory even.

It must have been some old dressing-gown of the time of Monsieur de Roquelaure (the contemporary of Tallemant des Réaux, of course), the skirts of which being worn out (we are speaking of the dressing-gown) had undergone amputation, whereby the original garment was transformed into a jacket with sleeves.

The marquis saw that Bannière was examining in detail the object presented to him and that the process was not advantageous to the object.

"Come, try it on, try it on!" said he, to divert the amateur's attention.

Bannière tried it on.

It must have been a trifle absurd, as Bannière had anticipated, for Madame Marion, well disposed as she had shown herself to be toward him, could not restrain a tremendous shout of merriment when she saw him arrayed in that ancient garment.

The fact is that a helmet, such as was then worn, red breeches, and cavalry boots made a most farcical appearance in connection with that jacket.

Bannière, while trying on the jacket, kept hold of his coat by the sleeve; but at last he was compelled to let it fall, and the spectators heard the sharp, silvery, yet deadened sound of a well-filled purse striking the flagstones, the metallic clinking being stifled, however, by the thickness of the cloth.

Thereupon, as if strung on wires, the Marquis della Torra and the merchant straightened up, and looked at each other with a brightening of the countenance which Bannière must have understood, if he had not been absorbed by the disgraceful spectacle of himself in that *passé* jacket with sleeves of unconscionable length.

Madame Marion blushed, and turned toward the famous picture on the wall, which she began to study anew.

The marquis, with all his pride of birth, developed at once a most earnest desire to make himself agreeable; the weight of the purse, no doubt, calculated mathematically noise it had made as it fell, convinced the marquis had no mere vulgar dragoon to deal with.

Indeed, it might very well be so. Many sons of families of rank enlisted in the dragoons, who were a privileged corps; and every son of a good family is an honorable friend in the eyes of a captain, when he has a purse as well filled as Bannière's seemed to be.

The purse, — that is the most satisfactory pedigree to a stranger.

They made Bannière try on, in like manner, the white dimity breeches; then they gave him a pair of slippers as badly worn as the rest, — more so, indeed.

But just as they were handing these articles to him, the captain said to the merchant, —

"One moment, one moment! What the devil are you doing! How fast you go, my dear fellow! My jacket, very good; my breeches, all right: they are things without any special value, and I am anxious to accommodate our young friend." As he spoke, the marquis glanced in fatherly fashion at Bannière. "But those slippers! No, no, no! I cannot do it; they were embroidered by my Marion, and I must keep them."

Marion, as the captain spoke, cast a glance of such singular meaning at Bannière, that the dragoon, forgetting Olympe for an instant, pushed his feet still farther into the slippers, and cried with a sly smile, —

"They have belonged to me for a second, so they can have no more value for you, Monsieur le Marquis; I appeal to Madame herself."

"Nothing could be better said," cried the dealer in silks. "No, Monsieur le Marquis, no, Madame la Marquise, you surely will not be so cruel as to offend this worthy gentleman by taking the slippers off his feet. Be firm, young man, be firm," he added in an undertone, "and the slippers are yours."

The marquis politely bent his head in token of acquies-

cence; Marion smiled sweetly, and the slippers remained in Bannière's possession.

To form an accurate idea of Bannière's opinion of himself, you should have seen him view himself in that remarkable costume in the little cracked mirror which graced the wall of the dining-room. In very truth, of all the more or less extraordinary outfits which the worthy ex-novice had had upon his back one after the other, not excluding the black robe of the order, there was not one, it must be said, so ill adapted to set off his natural charms.

So he sighed long and deeply.

The marquis, like a shrewd politician, grasped the condition of affairs.

"Yes, I understand, my gallant soldier-boy, you consider that that costume hardly does you justice; but believe me, young man, a military coat is sometimes very embarassing. We have many officers in the district, and some of them are inquisitive beyond measure. If one of these officers should take it into his head to want to look at your papers, and your papers should happen not to be all right, — why, you 'd be in a pretty pickle with your dragoon uniform! Upon my word, you will be much more comfortable in your mind in my shabby old velvet jacket."

This was Bannière's own honest opinion. The innocent manner in which he fell into the trap — that is to say, the silence with which he thought fit to receive the marquis's observation, — fully convinced the two strangers that they had rendered a great service to this wandering dragoon.

They looked upon him therefore from that time on as their own property; and, the soup being by this time on the table, they all sat down together, Madame la

Marquise della Torra being placed at the left of her embroidered slippers.

Bannière was hungry, and the odor from the dinner was appetizing in the extreme; so the gastronomic quartette devoted the first few moments to discussing with due appreciation mine host's viands and wines.

After a while Bannière, recovering from the humiliating effect of his absurd costume, took the lead in conversation, and emitted a few clever remarks, interrupted by sighs.

The *bon-mots* were for Marion, the sighs for Olympe. He was too much in love, as we know, to be witty all the time.

When his eyes rested upon the marquise, he felt a strange sensation; memories of Olympe, mingled with memories of La Catalane, crowded upon his brain, — memories of joy and of hatred; rose-lined clouds, and clouds that lowered.

By a strange freak of chance, the Marquise Marion had La Catalane's lips and Olympe's hair. The result was that, simply from looking at her, poor Bannière was oppressed with visions of the past, — most unhealthy nourishment even for healthy minds, *a fortiori* for those which are diseased.

A curious effect was produced upon Bannière by this partial resemblance to Olympe; it caused him to forget everything except the image evoked by it, including the marquise and her two companions; he drank the wine and forgot it; he had sold his dragoon's coat, and he forgot not the coat alone, but the enlistment which had resulted in his assumption of that garment. Above the soiled cloth, among the lighted tapers, a graceful phantom was flitting, now losing itself in the dark corners of the room, and again reappearing unexpectedly and filling

the whole place with mysterious life. In the fire, in the wine, and in the future Bannière saw nothing but Olympe.

He was aroused in the first place from his reverie by a very pathetic sigh from the Marquise Marion.

But he relapsed immediately.

Then by an exclamation from the Marquis della Torra:

"*Sangdieu!*" he cried; "but our young friend has no boots now!"

"Of course he has n't," replied the merchant, "since he exchanged them for your slippers."

"Then he will not be able to ride."

"True again," said the merchant.

"By Jove, that 's so," said Bannière.

"No boots," the marquise chimed in, "but something to buy them with."

With that she threw a glance at Bannière, which stopped on the way, or if it reached its destination, was not construed as it was intended to be.

"Oh, Monsieur, I am sure of it," said the marquis, with the same look which had already led Bannière to a decision on one occasion; "Monsieur will be no more anxious to retain his horse than his uniform."

Bannière started.

"And he will be quite right," added the marquis, very significantly.

"It is unfortunate that the horse is foundered," said the merchant; "I should like very well to own him otherwise. He is really a fine-looking beast."

"Well, buy him then," said Bannière; "with a little care you will bring him round all right, I 'll answer for it."

"Impossible."

"Why so?"

"Besides, is n't he branded with the regimental cipher, or the king's *fleur-de-lis?*"

"He is branded with the *fleur-de-lis*, like every invalided horse."

"There, you see that you admit that he is invalided."

"Bah!" Bannière insisted; "what does the brand amount to? It can't be seen if the saddle is put on in a certain way."

"That's very well; put it on that way, if you choose, young man. But understand that, so far as I am concerned, the brand is a fault; but then, what's the use of talking about a foundered horse? No!"

"I should be very easy to deal with as to price, however," said Bannière, imprudently.

"No matter how cheap you would sell him, he would still be too dear," said the merchant.

"Anything which is good for nothing is too dear at any price," sententiously observed the marquis.

"But after all, Captain?"

"Arrange it to suit yourselves," replied the marquis, "and let me go to sleep; I am ready to drop, I'm so sleepy."

He stretched himself out on a couch near the chimney-piece, taking care to turn his back on Bannière and Marion.

Five minutes later the Marquis della Torra was snoring like a duke.

XLI.

HE WHO HAS GAMBLED WILL GAMBLE AGAIN.

This unlooked-for drowsiness annoyed Bannière considerably. He was very anxious to dispose of his horse, even though it should be no more advantageously than he had disposed of his uniform.

The merchant, too, seemed much put out.

"Ah!" he cried, "Monsieur le Marquis has gone off to sleep without giving me my revenge."

"Revenge for what?" asked Bannière.

"Oh, nothing of importance; revenge for a game of piquet, which we play almost every evening during our journey."

"Monsieur does not play," Marion hastened to say, trying to make herself more and more agreeable to Bannière, and taking advantage of the captain's siesta to use her eyes to that end.

The words, "Monsieur does not play," brought back to Bannière's ears the jingling of heaps of gold coins, the sound of dice rattling upon the cloth, and the ball rolling around upon the roulette table.

"Very seldom, Madame," he faltered.

"Very seldom is not never," said the dealer in silks; "then, too, there is playing and playing; to play for amusement is not playing."

"Very true," said Bannière.

"See," rejoined the merchant, lowering his voice as if to avoid waking the marquis, — "see, your unfortunate horse is not worth five pistoles."

"Oho!" exclaimed Bannière.

"No, he 's not worth that. Very well! I will play you for him against — against what?"

The merchant looked about as if seeking something to stake against Bannière's horse.

The marquis ceased to snore, opened his eyes, and just as Banniére was about to reply, —

"Who is talking about playing?" he cried; "that damned merchant again! What a living dice-box! That devilish fellow is the very incarnation of gambling."

The merchant, who did appear to be an ardent gambler, tried to argue.

"But, Monsieur le Marquis — " he began to remonstrate.

"Let us have a little rest, for God's sake! Why, here 's a poor boy who perhaps has n't enough money for his wants, and you must needs make a hole in it! Oh, it 's shameful! It 's easy to see that you are of plebeian extraction, my friend. Let this dragoon go his way, and if he has any money, let him keep it. Gold does not grow in the streets, my good fellow."

"But, Monsieur le Capitaine — " the merchant insisted.

"Hold your tongue!" said the marquis, savagely; "it 's a wicked thing that you 're doing. Do you suppose that everybody has a fund of a hundred thousand pistoles to draw upon, as you have?"

"Oh, Monsieur le Marquis exaggerates!" cried he of the blue stockings, with a bow.

"No, indeed I don't exaggerate, for you have all of that; either in golden crowns or in silks, it 's all one. But he would like to make me a gambler too, upon my soul! — me, who detest dice, and cannot bear the touch of cards."

Bannière, without regarding the significant glances of Madame Marion in his direction, undertook to plead with

the indignant marquis in behalf of the worthy merchant, who had flushed up like a turkey-cock under this reprimand.

"I assure you, Monsieur le Capitaine," he said, "that this honest citizen, whom you abuse so, has put no violence upon me."

"Indeed, indeed! He tried to compel you to play, he talked about your horse, or the devil take me! I am much mistaken if I did n't hear him."

The merchant seemed to make an effort to rebel against the marquis's assumption of authority.

"Suppose I did speak of the horse," he said with a degree of firmness which seemed heroic to Bannière, "does that prove that I am vicious? Don't you ever play yourself, pray, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"Zounds, yes! I do play, and like to play too, but for the purpose of losing. If I thought I should win, understand that I would never play, Monsieur. I presume that, rich as you are, you will hardly think of comparing your fortune to mine. Even if I were to play so as to lose ten thousand livres a day for a whole year, my Della Torra estates would not be impaired at the end of that time."

"What delicacy of sentiment seems to animate these people!" said Bannière to himself.

"*Mon Dieu!* I know it," said the merchant, "I know it; but the moment that I should decline to lend you anything on your estates —"

"What 's that?" interrupted the marquis; "if you propose to adopt that tone with me, why, *mordieu!* I will give you as good as you send. You want to play, blackguard, do you? You want to risk your crowns, you dog, do you? So be it, then! put these famous crowns of yours on the table, pull them out into the light; they are dying for lack of fresh air."

"But, Monsieur le Marquis," said the merchant, whose features began to exhibit considerable concern, "I am not such a madman as you seem to think. I play without excitement."

"And so do I, by my blood!" cried the marquis. "Just see if I lose my head! Am I calm or not? I was asleep, as this youth will bear witness, and you waked me, my friend. Very well! I propose to lose a hundred thousand crowns this evening, or to ruin you; that 's business."

"Upon my word, you terrify me, Monsieur le Marquis."

"Come on, come on, Monsieur Gambler."

"But this is no game that you propose; it 's a duel."

"How much have you?"

"Upon my person?"

"Yes, or in your chest."

"Why, Monsieur le Marquis —"

"Pshaw!"

"What?"

"To the table! to the table, quickly!"

"But, Captain —"

"Ah! he declines. Oh, yes, I understand; brave as a lion when he has to do with the empty purse of our little dragoon, my rascal backs down when the strong box of Della Torra is to be reckoned with. Come, come, have we the pluck? Yes? All right, then, out with the great crowns and the louis d'or, and the bank-notes, when the crowns and louis are exhausted; damned be he who cries quarter!"

"Come on then, if you will," said the merchant.

"If I will! I should think so!"

"You 're absolutely sure?"

"Absolutely."

Then he turned to Bannière.

"This deuce of a fellow," he whispered, "has the heart of a king. Pity me, dragoon, for I am a ruined man."

With a sigh the merchant took his place at the table.

In an instant the stakes were laid.

The marquis displayed a pile of bank-notes, huge enough to make a lucky Mississippi shareholder stare; while the merchant, fumbling in his pockets, and drawing them out one by one, produced modestly fifteen louis or thereabouts, glistening among ten or twelve pale silver crowns.

At sight of the louis and the bank-notes, Bannière felt all the gambler's instinct spring into life at the bottom of his soul, while his clinched hand played with the fifty or sixty louis remaining in his pocket; then with his chin in his hands, burning eyes, and tightly closed lips he leaned his elbows on the table and watched.

The Marquise Marion, nibbling at sweetmeats, supported herself partly against a chair and partly upon Bannière's shoulder.

It was evident, however, that the dragoon's emotion did not communicate itself to her. She must have been accustomed to such sights.

The battle waged furiously; for it was, as the merchant had said, a veritable battle rather than a game.

The marquis had the advantage at first, and joked his opponent very pleasantly. All the merchant's louis save one solitary louis made acquaintance with the marquis's pile of notes.

But with the last remaining coin the luck turned, and the merchant had his turn at winning, in such fashion, however, and with such rapidity that the pile of notes melted away like butter from the marquis's side, and took their way one by one to the merchant's right hand.

Bannière was lost in admiration; it was impossible to lose with more grace and nonchalance than was displayed by the noble marquis.

Mere spectator though he was, the ex-novice felt the perspiration gather upon his brow. If one is a true gambler, one has no need to play to experience all the emotions; it is enough to watch others play.

The sums which had disappeared from the bundle of notes grew to be enormous. The poor merchant seemed more and more embarrassed. He was ashamed of his good luck. It was a veritable battle royal between grandeur on the one side and honesty on the other.

Bannière had tears in his eyes. He felt that it was not in his nature either to win or to lose thus.

"Ah, Monsieur," said the merchant,—"ah, Monsieur le Marquis, let us stop, I implore you. You have struck an unlucky vein."

"Pshaw!" replied the captain; "a good deal of fuss you 're making over a paltry fifty thousand livres or so! Come, let us go on, let us go on!"

"Madame la Marquise," cried the merchant, with clasped hands, "beg Monsieur le Capitaine to stop."

"Bah! my wife will have a diamond or two less in the jewel-box which I expect to give her on her birthday," said the marquis; "and she will not make any wry faces at her husband on that account, will she, Marion?"

The marquise shrugged her shoulders.

"It is an extraordinary run of luck, is it not?" said the merchant to Bannière.

"Indeed it is," replied the dragoon; "I never saw anything like it. Monsieur le Marquis is in a fair way to lose all that he possesses this evening."

Bannière had hardly finished speaking when a combi-

nation of aces swept away two thousand livres more from the marquis.

"Oh, this is too much at one time!" cried the merchant; "I decline to play, I am winning too much."

He threw down the cards as if disgusted with his good fortune.

"Come, my friend," said the marquis, "one last stake of ten thousand livres!"

"Oh, Monsieur le Marquis, reflect!"

"About what?"

"Reflect that you are in bad luck, and that it will be throwing away ten thousand livres."

"No; I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"That I shall recoup on this last stake."

The merchant shook his head.

"Go on, go on, one last stake!" said Bannière, intensely interested.

"So be it," said the merchant, "since you insist upon it. But how shall we play for the ten thousand livres?"

"The one who has the best 'point' on the deal wins."

"Done!"

The cards were dealt.

The marquis had a point of six in diamonds, but the merchant had one of seven in hearts.

He gathered up the ten thousand livres, and said, rising from his chair, —

"Upon my word, Monsieur le Marquis, I am confused with my luck, and I hope you will remember that you compelled me to play."

"That 's all right," said the marquis, smiling; "when two men play against each other, it 's absolutely necessary that one or the other should lose. I only ask one

favor of you, and that is that you will give my wife that beautiful damask gown which you are keeping for the Princesse de Beaufremont."

"Yes, indeed, Madame, — that and two others with it, if you will accept them."

Bannière wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Never did I see such a game or such gamblers," he said aloud.

"Yet how sad it is," cried the marquis, looking philosophically at the ceiling, "and how blind is fortune! Here I have been losing sixty thousand livres to a millionaire, while I have under my eyes a poor fellow whom the third part of that sum would perhaps make happy for life."

"Oh, twenty thousand livres! Yes, twenty thousand livres would make me very happy," murmured Bannière, thinking that of the twenty thousand he would spend fifteen to find Olympe again, and that it would be very hard if he could not do it with that sum.

"And yet," continued Della Torra, plunging deeper and deeper into the realms of philosophy, "what would have been necessary to effect that result? Simply that Monsieur," indicating Bannière, "should have been seated in the chair of that asinine merchant, and that the asinine merchant should have been seated in his."

"*Dame!* what would you have, Monsieur le Marquis? it's fate," said the winner.

"No, it's the lucky vein. In your place the dragoon might not have won, perhaps."

"Oh, yes, he would," the merchant interrupted, in a tone of absolute conviction.

"Bah! why so?" asked Bannière.

"Because, Monsieur, the vein belongs to the seat, and not to the man who sits in it," said he of the stockings, sententiously.

"Do you think so?" said Bannière.

"He's right," said the captain; "upon my word, I believe he's right!"

"So you agree with Monsieur, do you?" said Bannière.

"Oh, perfectly! There's no obstinacy in my character."

"Sit down there a minute, Monsieur," said the merchant, pushing Bannière toward the famous seat, "and try it; we 'll see how it works."

"Oh, no, no!" said the marquis; "enough of that sort of thing. My hands are positively weary with shuffling the cards."

"Go on, go on!" the merchant insisted.

"No, the luck would not last; it follows the money on the cloth, not the idea in the gambler's brain."

"Oh, well!" said Bannière, "we might try it for a few crowns."

"Just one crown, out of curiosity," said the marquis.

"Impossible!" said Bannière, in his most high and mighty tone.

"Why so, pray?"

"Because I only play with gold."

"Very well," said the marquis, carelessly; "venture a louis then, if you really insist."

Resuming his seat nonchalantly, he shuffled the cards with the languid air of a man little accustomed to take so much trouble for so small a stake.

Bannière cut, and the marquis dealt the cards.

The former took up his hand, and found in it three aces, three kings, three queens, and a point of six. He discarded two queens and a king, and took up the fourth ace and the last two cards of his point.

He lay down his hand, and won the stake.

The marquis tossed him a louis, laughing uproariously.

"Oh, it 's very strange," said the merchant; "do go on."

They began again; and Bannière still won, as he did the third time.

Then the merchant suggested that they double the stake, to see how much Bannière could win while the luck lasted.

The demon of play was upon the dragoon, muttering in the depths of his heart, —

"Gold! gold! gold!"

He accepted the suggestion, and in half an hour he had won two hundred louis in bank-notes.

Then the luck changed; the vein was worked out, no doubt.

Bannière began to lose and was delighted, for he had begun to be ashamed of his good luck, as the merchant was. But he continued to lose so persistently that the enchantment came to an end. However he had lost only what he had won; he might consider the games played as a mere experiment, stop there, and not encroach upon his store of louis.

But he was a true gambler, and had not the courage to stop. He began to stake his louis.

Once he had begun upon them the louis stole away, two by two, four by four, six by six. He had sixty louis, and they lasted about half an hour.

Sixty louis, — that is to say, more than he needed to take him to Paris to find Olympe.

The marquis thereupon, coolly and without any visible sign of satisfaction, bowed to Bannière, and pocketed his sixty louis. The dragoon attempted to borrow two louis to help him to entice back his luck. Two louis seemed a very trifle for a marquis rolling in wealth.

But to his unbounded amazement, the captain shook his head.

"My principle," said he, "from which I never depart, because it rests upon true morality, is not to encourage the young to ruin themselves. So, Monsieur, if you please, we will stop where we are."

Bannière was considerably confused; but in the words of the marquis he was forced to recognize that gentleman's superiority to himself, — a gentleman, too, who had lost sixty thousand livres without winking; so he lowered his nose like a school-boy.

Then the merchant leaned over to him in a friendly way.

"Come, young man," he said, "you still have your horse. What the deuce! Make Monsieur le Marquis disgorge. The horse against ten pistoles."

"What 's that?" said Della Torra.

"I say the horse against ten pistoles," the merchant repeated.

He added, in an undertone, to Banniére, —

"*Pardieu*! if you lose, you don't lose much."

It was the marquis's turn to shuffle.

He had in his hand on the last deal just what Bannière had in his on the first.

That was very curious.

Such tenacious winning amazed the dragoon, who began to look dark in spite of himself.

He had nothing left with which to pay his reckoning at the inn.

He made a remark to that effect, laughingly; the laugh, however, went no deeper then the end of his lips.

But the marquis, to Bannière's vast astonishment, instead of playing the grand seigneur and offering to ac-

commodate him, turned on his heel, and made for the door.

The dealer in silks had already vanished.

Bannière was overwhelmed. The thought that he had lost all means of overtaking Olympe and inducing her to return to him, drew a sigh from his bosom, and two great tears from his eyes.

Marion was about to leave the room in the wake of the Marquis della Torra.

She turned as she heard the sigh, and her eye perceived the two great tears. She was evidently touched thereby, for she raised her pink finger-tip to her lips, and winked significantly at Bannière.

He understood her to mean "Wait," and consequently "Hope." He had no particular hope, but he waited.

Twenty minutes had not elapsed ere Marion appeared at the window, and rapped with the tips of her fingers upon the glass.

Bannière opened it hastily.

"Monsieur," said she, in a low voice, "you have been robbed."

With that she fled precipitately, or, rather, she flew away like a bird, without waiting even for Bannière to kiss the fair fingers which had drummed so gracefully upon the window.

XLII.

IN WHICH BANNIÈRE TAKES HIS REVENGE.

BANNIÈRE stood a moment speechless and motionless. He was simply struck dumb by what he had heard. His love and his self-esteem were alike deeply wounded.

After a moment, however, he recovered the power of speech.

"Robbed!" he muttered, while a shiver ran over his whole frame. "What! the Marquis della Torra, captain in the Abruzzi regiment, and the worthy millionaire merchant, leagued together to rob me! Impossible!"

These reflections passed through his brain very rapidly, — so rapidly that they had taken shape before Marion had reached the middle of the stable-yard, and yet the graceful creature's step was as light and swift as air.

But Bannière was light of foot, as well as she, especially when spurred by some violent passion. With one leap he reached the hall, with a second the courtyard, and at the third he reached her side and seized her in his arms.

Feeling the arms clasped about her, and the burning breath on her cheek, she began to turn pale and shiver, as if she were under the influence of a sorcerer.

Night came to her aid; if the dark-eyed goddess, daughter of Chaos, and sister of Erebus, does sometimes shelter robbers, as the fable tells us, it has also favors to grant to honest people now and then.

"What did you mean, dear Marion," whispered Bannière in the young woman's ear, "by saying that I had been robbed?"

"I meant nothing less than just what I said."

"Robbed?"

"Yes. Do you know what a Greek is?"

"A Greek?" said Bannière, wonderingly; "to be sure, I do, I learned it at college; it is a man born in Greece."

"Oh, no, my dear Monsieur!"

"Pray, what else is it?"

"The Greeks are clever folk who use their skill to repair the neglect of fortune."

"Sharpers, eh?"

"'Sharpers' is a very hard name; 'Greeks' is more courteous."

"So the merchant is a Greek?"

"Precisely so."

"And the marquis is a Greek too? And your husband, the captain —"

"Oh, Monsieur, he is no captain; neither is he my husband."

"In any event, whether he is all that or not, you are an angel."

To prove to Marion that his words were the index of his thought, he took two hearty kisses, whereat the young woman's heart beat very fast.

"One word more, little Marion. How did the marquis — I call him marquis, because I must call him something."

"He robbed you by means of a system of signals with the merchant."

"But all the coin, and all the notes which they waved in my face. Surely it was coin, and the others were notes?"

"The coin was genuine, and comprised the whole stock of our pretended millionaires; the notes were false, as you could easily have seen if you had looked closely at them."

They had reached that point in their conversation when a window on the first floor opened, and they heard the captain's voice,—

"Marquise Marion! Marquise Marion! Well, well, where are you, I should like to know?"

"He is calling me, do you hear?" said the young woman; "he is calling me. Oh, Monsieur, let me go! He will kill me."

She released herself, returned Bannière one of his kisses, and disappeared in the darkness.

Bannière remained alone in the middle of the gloomy courtyard.

Then all that he had heard of clever sleight-of-hand performers, who can make a cup dance under one's nose without its being seen, came into his mind. He remembered that in every game he had played with the pretended marquis, he had continually seen or felt or imagined, as you choose to put it, one card longer than the others in the pack, and that two or three times while he was shuffling, he had tried to push that card in so that its edge would be even with the rest.

He remembered also that the noble marquis invariably left that card underneath in cutting, so that it was one of the stock left for the dealer when he discarded.

"Marion was right," said he; "I see how they did it. Now, Bannière, my boy, you must be as clever as these gentlemen; a Greek and a half against a Greek."

He began to consider, and if it had been daylight his sombre features would have been seen to clear gradually under the inspiration of that internal fire which is called thought.

In five minutes his countenance was perfectly serene once more; he had made up his mind.

"I have them," said he.

He turned about without further delay, and, guided by the lighted window which served him as a beacon, found his way to the quarters of the false Marquis della Torra, who, with the false dealer in silks, was drinking coffee, strong coffee, flavored with a liqueur which was very grateful to sight and smell.

Marion had just come in, flushed and breathless, poor child, and was undergoing a little lecture, which Bannière interrupted by knocking at the door.

"Walk in," was the reply without too much delay.

Bannière walked in, rosy and gracious and smiling; his whole bearing spoke of perfect good-humor. The actor had made over the gambler's face.

"Monsieur le Marquis," he began, "I have a little secret to tell you."

The merchant rose. He was a very tactful gentleman, and wished to withdraw so as to leave Bannière and the marquis alone and free to speak.

But Bannière fathomed his purpose, and insisted upon his remaining.

"Don't go, Monsieur, I beg of you," said he. "Are not all secrets safe in the breast of such a gallant fellow as you?"

The marquis was not altogether at his ease, despite the appearance of extreme courtesy.

"What is it, my dear fellow," said he, assuming his noble manner; "what do you want of me?"

"Monsieur," rejoined Bannière, "it is a hard thing to tell, but I must come to it."

"Say on, dragoon."

"You see that I am here, Monsieur."

"I am listening."

"Monsieur, I am not honorably retiring from the service; I am running away."

"We suspected as much," replied the captain, harshly; "but beware, young man, these are not such secrets as the Marquis della Torra, captain in the Abruzzi regiment, can hear with approbation."

"Alas! that is true, Monsieur, yet I hope that you will be indulgent to a poor young fellow, and do me a great favor."

The Marquis della Torra thought he could smell a loan in the air, and he assumed the expression of a banker locking up his vaults.

He was just about to interrupt Bannière when that gentleman interrupted himself.

"Hush! listen!" said he, mysteriously.

Instinctively the two men approached; they began to get scent of something out of course.

"My purse," Bannière continued, "was not my only source of supply; I had besides —"

He looked inquiringly about.

"What? What had you?" asked the two men in one breath.

"I had a great bag of money."

"Ah!" exclaimed the captain and merchant in unison, their interest being renewed by this confidence. "A bag?"

"Yes."

"A large bag?"

"Containing ten thousand livres."

"Ten thousand livres!"

The two men licked their chops, and cast a sidelong glance at each other.

"Pray, what did you do with the precious bag,

dragoon?" the marquis asked with fatherly solicitude. "Tell us."

"I thought I was pursued when I was just entering this village, a quarter of a league back; and as my horse was dead tired, and the bag very heavy, I threw it into a ditch under the willows, taking careful note of the place where I left it, so that I might find it again when it should be dark."

"Oho!" exclaimed the confederates.

"So that, now that night has come —"

Bannière made a significant gesture to the two Greeks, who looked at one another in utter bewilderment. They had never encountered such an unparalleled ass as this dragoon, who was not content with being plundered once, but was in such haste to go through the same operation a second time.

"Well," said Bannière, "now do you understand?"

"No, not perfectly," the marquis replied.

"If Monsieur le Marquis does not understand perfectly," said the merchant, "please understand yourself that I do not understand at all."

"Why, I want you to go with me."

"Oh, with pleasure!"

"With a lantern?"

"Yes."

"But why go with you?"

"For several reasons: in the first place, because you know the country much better than I, and will help me not to lose myself; secondly, because I don't like to go abroad alone at night; and lastly, because the landlord might be suspicious and uneasy if he should see me leave his hotel alone at night, with a lantern. Indeed he has already exhibited considerable astonishment at my transformation from a dragoon to — whatever I am."

"True! true!" said the two worthies; "at your service."

"Then do you take a club," said Bannière to the pseudo-dealer in silks; "Monsieur le Marquis will take his sword, and I my sabre."

"But why take all those things?"

"To guard against robbers, of course; a bag containing ten thousand livres is worth the trouble of defending it."

"True enough," was the reply.

"How about me?" said Marion; "am I to carry nothing?"

"You, Madame," said Bannière, mingling a little gallantry with his affected simplicity, "may carry the lantern, if you please, and light our way."

Each one did as agreed. Marion took the lantern; the merchant armed himself with a club; the marquis girded on his sword, which he had laid across a chair in order to sip his coffee more conveniently; and Bannière, discarding belt and scabbard, took his bare sabre under his arm. The procession left the hostelry with careful step, ears pricked, and noses in the air.

Marion, anxious and perplexed, overflowing with admiration of Bannière's *sang-froid* and with curiosity as to the result, marched at the head, performing the duties of will-o-the-wisp with her lantern.

Bannière set the pace, and it was a rapid one, so that they were soon outside the village.

It was eleven o'clock in the evening; the fields were dark, deserted, and peaceful. On the horizon some belated light would twinkle for a moment, like a star, and now and then in the distance could be heard the barking of a dog.

On the right of the road they were travelling, ran the famous ditch, bordered with willows, separating the

road from a level field whose velvety carpet shone green as emerald in the rays of the lantern.

They had travelled in this wise for a quarter of a league or thereabouts, when Bannière halted, and seemed to be trying to locate his position.

"This is the place," said he. "Madame la Marquise, give me your hand and jump the ditch."

Marion was tempted to reply that she had leaped wider ditches than that; but she liked to touch Bannière's hand, so she accepted it, and sprang across.

The Marquis della Torra stretched his long legs, and landed on the other side. The merchant made a little short leap,— too short, alas! for he came down upon the sloping side of the ditch, and as his legs failed him, he slid gracefully down into the water on his face.

Neither the marquis nor Bannière paid any attention to him, and he was compelled to extricate himself from the difficulty as best he could. He finally succeeded without other loss than that of his club, which he let drop as he fell, and which was carried down stream.

Meanwhile Bannière had stopped, and with Marion and the marquis formed a group, which the merchant soon joined, dripping wet from his waist down.

"Well?" said the marquis, inquiringly, when the group was complete.

"Well?" echoed Bannière.

"Where is what we are looking for?" the marquis continued.

"What we are looking for?"

"Yes, the stuff that you lost, I mean."

"The stuff that I lost is there," cried Bannière, "there in your pocket, and you are going to restore it to me on the instant."

"Upon my word!" cried the stupefied marquis.

"Oho!" muttered the merchant.

"No noise!" continued Bannière. "You are not a marquis, you are not a captain, your name is not Della Torra; you are a Greek, a sharper, a thief."

"I?"

"Yes, you; I knew all the evening that you were playing the long-card game on me."

"Villain!"

"Come, no words! You have a sword, and I a sabre; draw, and quickly, unless you want me to kill you on the spot with your sword in its sheath. It's all one to me so long as I kill you."

The merchant undertook to come to the assistance of his comrade, and in default of the club, which had gone swimming off by itself toward the village, he drew a knife from his pocket; but Bannière made a pass at him, and dealt him a blow which split his brown coat from waist to shoulder.

The merchant did not ask for the balance of his reckoning; he beat a hasty retreat, with a groan which proved that the lining of his doublet was punctured.

As for the marquis, he seemed to have taken root as he stood there pale and trembling, without even drawing his sword.

"Come, come," said Bannière, "let us do something. As we do not fight, let us empty the pockets."

Marion looked on at this triumph of the dragoon over the captain, half terrified and half delighted; she smiled and cried, and stamped her little feet.

It is incredible how a woman will always prefer a man whom she never knew till the day before, to the man whom she has known for years. Does this mean that woman is fickle, or that man does not improve on acquaintance?

At last the marquis, driven to desperation by Bannière's insults and Marion's equivocal behavior, drew his sword.

But his trembling hand was very weak; and Bannière had no sooner crossed blades with him than the marquis's weapon fell from his hand.

He thought that he was a dead man, and fell on his knees. But Bannière had a merciful heart; he contented himself with dealing the marquis a few vigorous blows with the flat of his sabre, and then set about the principal work, the investigation of his pockets.

But in vain did he turn the wretched pockets inside out and back again; of the sixty louis which the marquis had swindled him out of, he found, after much searching, only two or three.

"Ah," cried Marion, sorrowfully, "if I had only known that that was what you were looking for!"

"What then?" asked Bannière, still fumbling, but to no purpose, among the captain's clothes.

"Then I would have told you that the merchant is the cashier of the party."

"The devil!" cried Bannière, angrily.

But as he was a youth who made up his mind quickly, he said at once, —

"Let us run, let us run; perhaps we may overtake him before he reaches the inn."

"Yes, let us run," echoed Marion, who had made up her mind to make common cause with our hero; "let us run, we may overtake him."

Having given the marquis a postscript of two or three blows with the flat of the sabre for good measure, Bannière started to return to the inn, with Marion clinging to his arm and running beside him as light of foot as Atalanta.

The marquis remained a prey to grief and shame at seeing Marion so happy in his overthrow, Marion the accomplice of a stranger! He uttered a cry which much resembled a roar. He undertook to pursue the fugitive damsel; but Bannière turned upon him, and he stopped where he was. Thereupon the youth made a step in his direction, and the marquis turned on his heel and fled.

Bannière resumed his course. He relied upon the brevity of the merchant's legs to overtake him; but fear had elongated them, and not only did he not catch him, but when he reached the inn he found that the rascal had had time to get clear away.

Like Bilboquet, he had saved the chest.

Bannière rushed to the stable, hoping that he had at least forgotten the horse; but the merchant's memory was excellent, and notwithstanding all the bad points and infirmities he had detected in the beast, he had saddled and bridled him, and ridden away at a gallop.

Thus there remained to Bannière absolutely nothing but two louis and Marion.

The poor boy was in utter despair when he had assured himself of this last blow; but the disaster was irreparable, and it was well to put as good a face as possible upon it. He summoned the landlord and began to tell his story, the result being that mine host made him pay upon the spot for his own dinner and that of his three table companions, — a demand to which Bannière submitted without much demur, being by no means anxious to have any trouble with the authorities of the place.

Of the two louis there remained in his possession only eight crowns — and Marion, who was lovely and loving enough to have been sufficient consolation under any circumstances, if Olympe were out of mind.

But Bannière's heart had room for but the one love; and so as his eye fell upon the lovely child gazing tearfully and imploringly at him with clasped hands, —

"Alas! my dear," said he, "unfortunately you have before you a man bankrupt in heart and in purse! I shall never forget the service you have done me, but I will not insult you by offering you less than it is worth. Listen! You are fair enough to have known what love is. Well, I love to distraction a woman whom I am now hastening to join, and who has twice been the cause of my desertion, — once from the Jesuits, and again from the dragoons. I am well aware that you have left that blackguard of a marquis for me, but it may be that I have done you good service in that respect. Some day he would have compromised you, and you would have lost your life, or at least have been imprisoned. So we will part now, if you please, dear Marion."

Marion heaved a sigh, and gazed at Bannière.

"Alone in the middle of the night," said she.

She pronounced these words in a tone so full of pathos that Bannière's heart was deeply moved. He returned her gaze, sadly shaking his head.

"Without money or a place to lay my head," she added in a lower tone.

She hung her head, and Bannière instinctively felt that her eyes filled with tears.

"I have eight crowns," said he; "here are six of them for you."

A fascinating siren was this woman, and there were tones in her voice which would have softened the wise Ulysses, much more Bannière, who had never set himself up as the peer in sagacity of the King of Ithaca.

However history does not tell the particulars of his parting with this chance companion; but it is cer-

tain that Marion was all alone at the inn the next morning.

She deserved a happier fate than was in store for her, poor child! Her nature was such that her life might surely have been turned to better things, had the good angels but come to her before her evil genius had taken full possession of the field.

XLIII.

BANNIÈRE AT PARIS.

BANNIÈRE in his jacket of chocolate-colored velvet, dimity breeches, and slippers, was destined, as may well be imagined, to produce a most striking effect upon the highways over which his route lay; every passer-by stopped to look at him, and only went on again when he was well out of sight.

He was the cause of delay to those who stopped to gaze at him, but nothing delayed *him*.

He had but three crowns with which to accomplish a journey of a hundred leagues, — three crowns because Marion had compelled him to retain that number, and had absolutely refused to accept more than five. Even then he had a struggle with her, for she said it was too much for her to take five crowns out of eight, especially as he had so much longer a journey before him than she; and then, too, a pretty woman is never so much incommoded without money as a man in the same plight, even though he possessed in his single person all the charms of Endymion and Adonis.

Oh, well! even with these three paltry crowns — incredible as it may seem, and yet I hope the gentle reader will believe it as soon as he has my word for it — Bannière contrived to save, and with his savings he bought a pair of shoes.

Poor Marion's slippers had done all that brave slippers could be expected to do; they held out for twenty leagues

after which the uppers dropped off on one side and the soles on the other.

The matter of food was of the least importance to Bannière. He lived at the expense of the vines and walnut and hazel-nut trees; and as every good meal ought to include a vegetable or two, he would take a carrot or an onion from the first field he passed, often amid the sharp expostulations of the peasants; but when he would tell them (or their wives) that he was hungry, and had committed that petty theft to satisfy his hunger, the peasant, male or female, who had begun by shrieking at him would often end by dividing his bread with him.

He subsisted in this way, asking shelter at stables or barns, and when it was refused, sleeping under the bright stars, in some haymow or beneath some thickly leaved tree.

This was the only expedient Bannière had been able to find for avoiding adventures and lovelorn females; for it should be said that wherever the unlucky fellow showed his face, he made an immediate conquest.

"Alas!" he would say as he sat over his humble repast, "why am I not possessed of a magnet which attracts metal, rather than one which attracts the female heart? With the former I should already have more wealth than I should need to buy Olympe back, though she were in the harem of the Grand Turk himself, and he should ask by way of ransom the sum which Amurat demanded of the Duc de Bourgogne for the Comte de Nevers."

Now and then Bannière insensibly displayed his learning, which was one of the results of his early education at the Jesuit convent.

After eight days of desperate travelling, Bannière looked at himself one morning, like Narcisse, in the

mirror of a clear spring, and saw that his beard closely resembled that of Polyphemus. He had no choice but to get shaved.

He rose to his feet, after he had washed down his frugal breakfast with several deep draughts of limpid water, made for the nearest village, and found a barber, who performed the operation required.

While the razor was at work, Bannière, for the sake of saying something, asked the name of the village.

The barber gashed his chin as he replied, —

"The village of Vertus, Monsieur."

"How many leagues from Paris?" asked Bannière, trying to get a glimpse out of the corner of his eye, — a difficult feat! — of the drop of blood which was rolling down his chin.

"Two leagues, Monsieur, two short leagues."

The barber said "short leagues" because he thought he owed his customer something by way of compensation for cutting him.

Bannière leaped for very joy. He had not dreamed that he was so near Paris, which the morning mist had prevented him from seeing in the distance.

Paris is indeed a lovely city for men of wealth, — but we, though we should be charged with perpetrating a paradox, maintain that it is even lovelier for the poor; but above all has Paris attractions beyond compare for the adventurous fisherman who comes thither, like Bannière, to cast his net into that fathomless sea in search of a priceless pearl.

He had just one crown when he entered the capital; unfortunately he had also the velvet jacket and dimity breeches.

Perhaps it will be interesting for meditative minds to see how he will get clear of such an outfit; and they who

saw him dress ought to be really anxious to observe his manner of undressing.

Let us lift a corner of the curtain. Oh, you may look, Madame, though you were as great a prude as Madame de Maintenon herself; there will be nothing indecorous.

The dragoon, we ought to say, attracted little notice in the faubourgs. Paris swarms with eccentric characters. In the first place, Bannière arrived, as we said, in the morning; now the morning is the time chosen by a large number of poor government clerks or merchants' apprentices to do their daily marketing, and they show themselves, without ceremony, to their fellow-citizens in a costume which tragedy dignifies by the epithet "simple."

Racine; see *Britannicus*.

But by the side of the simple garb in which Junia presented herself to Nero, Bannière's costume was an extremely complex one.

Everything went well in the Faubourg Saint-Marcel; but the dragoon had no sooner passed through Rue de la Harpe, crossed the Pont Saint-Michel, and entered Rue Saint-Denis, than he realized how essential a respectable attire would be in prosecuting the plans which he was revolving in his brain.

To clothe himself decently would require six crowns at least, — just the number he had tried to force upon Marion, and twice as many as Marion had left with him.

As he had but one crown, it was of course out of the question; but that fact did not prevent him from gazing at a coat hanging outside the door of a dealer in old clothes.

Every one knows that the unwritten law of the second-hand clothes-trade is that the purchaser pays something

to boot, even though he exchanges a good article for a poor one, or a passable one for a worse.

Now this was not the case, for the Marquis della Torra's jacket ranked among the very worst. But this Bannière was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He who had determined to kill a man to recover what he had lost, had the luck to fall in with a woman.

It was just the reverse of the experience of Captain Pamphile, whose negress was a man; Bannière's old-clothes man was a woman.

He presented himself before her most courteously; his theatrical experience had accustomed him to make striking *entrées*. The merchant was about thirty, — still young, that is; she was almost pretty. She saw this handsome youth embarrassed by his shabby, absurd garments, and she smiled upon him.

Bannière made his request, and half laughing, half imploring, offered his crown for the coat.

The woman looked him over again, smiled again, and without a word took the coat from its hook and passed it to him.

He asked leave to go to the rear of the shop, and it was accorded with another smile even more gracious than the first two.

But Bannière in his wisdom had decided to pay no more attention to smiles. He passed into the back shop, and gently closed the door behind him.

Two seconds later he emerged, with the satisfaction of seeing himself attired in a fine summer coat, although the season had advanced as he had, and autumn had arrived, when he arrived at Paris. He had selected the coat, however, a linen one, as a better match for his dimity trousers than broadcloth or velvet.

The dealer gave Bannière a fourth and last smile; but

he disregarded it, and left the shop. It required some courage on his part to go away and leave that smile behind him, for its language was at least more cheerful than his self-communings.

This is what he was saying to himself, —

"I have nothing left with which to buy food, — not a sou, not a denier, not an obolus, — but I will not be ridiculous. If I continue to fast, which would be absurd in this city which feeds eight hundred thousand souls, so much the worse for my stomach, that's its affair; so much the worse too for my wit, for that would prove it not to be fertile in expedients."

This monologue did not prevent Bannière from thanking with all his heart the gracious old-clothes dealer, who was following him with her kindly eye. Several times he turned about, partly to wave his hand to her, and partly to see if the passers-by were turning to look at him.

No one seemed to take any notice of him, to his exceeding delight. It proved that he had ceased to be grotesque.

With a tranquil mind he at last reached the Boulevard. He sat down between two stones, leaning an arm upon each as if he were in an arm-chair, and amused himself by watching the dogs, who were more fortunate than he, in that they were enjoying their first meal of the day.

But it was something quite other than the dogs who knew he seemed to be looking at them, or their repast in which he seemed to be absorbed, which kept his eyes staring into vacancy and his mind active; it was his very serious anxiety to know how he could, in his present destitute condition, begin to adopt the necessary means of finding Olympe.

"She fled," he was saying, "with Monsieur de Mailly; he left Olympe before to be married, and since he has a wife he cannot have taken Olympe to his own house."

No; but he must have installed her in some secret establishment.

"Of course!" said Bannière to himself; "that 's the way it is; now it remains for me to learn where the secret establishments of the wealthy are located."

Thereupon he hailed a rustic who had in his hand a little perfumed note.

"Friend," said he, "tell me, please, where one should go in Paris to find abandoned women?"

The Auvergnat, for such he was, began to laugh, and went his way without any other reply. Bannière judged from his silence that the question was either too deep or too stupid, and that he did not understand it.

His judgment was correct.

This bad beginning made Bannière distrustful of himself.

"If I involve myself so," he said, "I am quite capable of making a fool of myself all the time. I don't know how it is, but I always begin at the wrong end.

"Why am I a fool in Paris, when I had some wit in the provinces?

"Because I am hungry and have on a thin coat. Now the longer I go without eating, the hungrier I shall be; the colder the weather grows, the thinner my coat will be.

What to do without a sou?

That question, the everlasting problem of the destitute and the ambitious, Bannière propounded to himself as he plunged his hands deeper into the pockets of his linen coat.

"What to do without a sou?" said he.

Suddenly he exclaimed aloud, and his right hand moved excitedly in its pocket.

Oh, happiness! he felt something cold against the end of his fingers, and recognized the presence of a piece of money.

To seize it, pull it out, look at it, and dance for joy was the work of a single second.

The good-natured creature had realized Bannière's need of his crown, and had stowed it away in the pocket of the linen coat.

And so he still had a crown, and was twenty-five times as rich as the Wandering Jew.

His first impulse was to rush back to the shop, and kiss the merchant on both cheeks. But he soon thought better of it, and determined instead to honor her thoughtful kindness by restoring himself to his normal condition through the agency of an abundant and satisfying repast.

Acting upon this determination, he entered a cook-shop in Rue du Ponceau.

XLIV.

HOW BANNIÈRE BREAKFASTED IN THE RUE DU PONCEAU COOK-SHOP, AND WHAT TOOK PLACE THEREAFTER.

SINCE the somewhat distant period in which the action of this tale is supposed to take place, the people of our country (of the only country, that is, where men really *eat*) seem to eat more than in old days, whereas they really eat much less. A hundred eating-house keepers like those who poison us to-day, are not worth, from the stomach's point of view, a single *rotisseur* of Rue de la Huchette.

The shop of the *rotisseur* of former times was a world in itself, something of which only Monsieur de Humboldt's *cosmos* can convey an adequate idea. The *rotisseur* himself was a multiple being, — fruiterer, provision-dealer, grocer, eating-housekeeper, and pastry-cook. He was everything, in short, except the wine-merchant, who maintained his specialty against all the *rotisseurs* in the world. With his chicken-gravy (we are speaking of the *rotisseur*, of course) he made delicious soups; with the chickens themselves, certain mysterious fricassees, of which none but the *rotisseurs* knew the secret. He served salads, eggs and game in all shapes, and even condescended to use the frying-pan for certain of his dishes.

Then, too, the *rotisseur*, as we have said, pressed the pastry-cook hard, and cooked all sorts of fancy dishes in

his oven, while the enormous spit, turning incessantly with a grating sound in front of the vast fireplace, furnished grease enough to supply all the kitchens of the quarter.

A famished man, if he entered one of these cook-shops could not possibly leave it in the same condition; however lean his purse, he was sure to find in that wonderful larder the means of eating to satiety.

From the lark at three sous to the fat pullet at three francs, from the humble pigeon to the golden pheasant, everything was to be found there, two-legged and four-legged, even to a whole ox, if it had been called for; and besides all that, the *rotisseur* plied his trade in private houses, and at very moderate cost, thanks to him, one could enjoy in his own dining-room a delicious repast, cooked as it should be.

Genuine cooking disappeared with the downfall of the *rotisseurs;* they will rise again some day, we have no doubt, as a necessity of the society of the future.

For our own part, no Homeric festival with its bubbling fat, nor the *pinguis forma* of Virgil, has ever tickled our palate and sense of smell in our halcyon days of enormous appetite, like those delicious sizzling roasts, smoking hot, which in imagination we have seen turning round and round over the dripping-pan of a *rotisseur* of the eighteenth century.

Bannière then entered the cook-shop. He selected a chicken at forty sous and a salad, which were carried for him to the nearest wine-shop, — a place (to find its like we must go back a hundred and thirty years) where wine was sold, real wine, the honest, unadulterated juice of the grape.

Bannière ordered two dozen oysters and two bottles of Burgundy.

Then by an effort of the will which underlies every well-organized mind, he forgot all his troubles, and settled himself comfortably in a corner, determined like a man of spirit to make a brave fight against the vampire called ennui and the demon melancholy, the two abandoned sons of love and separation.

He ate.

Right here we desire to give utterance to our respect for the public, and our liking for physical and moral refinement. No one likes better than we do to exhibit a hero of romance in glowing colors under all circumstances.

But we must confess that Bannière's stomach had rebelled; and in so doing had changed the man's whole nature, whereby his moral excellence was much diminished.

The stomach, if it is in bad humor, reacts upon the heart and the brain. It is needless to add that it also tends to render arms and legs of no account.

So it happened that the ex-dragoon had no sooner washed down the succulent oyster into his discontented stomach with a draught of generous wine, and the gentle warmth of the gastric juices had no sooner begun to mount to the eyes and play around the temples of the half-starved youth, than he seemed on the instant to view his situation through such rainbow-hued hopes as he had not known for a fortnight.

One would have said that the good Burgundy was no other than that magic beverage which Thessalian Canidia used to pour upon the tombs at midnight, to evoke the spirits of the dead. Under its influence Bannière was born again, his eyes were reopened, and he saw again, in his imagination of course, at the same moment the object which, of all the world contained, he most longed to see, — Olympe!

Olympe, to see Olympe again! — a thing that had seemed impossible the night before! But to-day it was the simplest thing in the world. For was not Olympe in Paris? And was not he, Bannière, in Paris also? The hardest part of the task was done, then, since he had already left behind him ninety-nine hundredths of the distance which had separated him from her.

Paris alone remained between them, — Paris, a more trackless labyrinth than that of Dædalus.

But, after all, what was this Paris? A city only seven leagues in circumference; consequently three leagues and a half in diameter in its widest part.

A trifling matter that for legs which had already made one hundred and thirty leagues, and had forgotten all about them, thanks to the oysters and the Burgundy, the chicken and salad.

He would find Olympe, then, by dint of searching everywhere on those famous legs of his.

Where was *everywhere?*

Everywhere, indeed! The *everywhere* of pretty girls is limited in extent. Although the Savoyard did not answer his question, Bannière well knew that a pretty girl's *everywhere* is the secret establishment of a nobleman; and among all the noblemen whom Paris held at that moment, there was no room for hesitation. Olympe had denounced herself in his cell at Lyons. It was Monsieur de Mailly who had come in quest of her, and it was Monsieur de Mailly who had spirited her away. Olympe then was installed in Monsieur de Mailly's secret establishment.

But where was it located? That was what remained to find out.

All! he would find out. But from whom?

From Monsieur de Mailly himself, of course.

He would go at once and ask Monsieur de Mailly where his little place was, and by persuasion or force would prevail upon Olympe to leave it.

It was a very simple idea, but one which had not come to him until he had discussed the oysters and the chicken and the salad, and especially the good Burgundy, and which in our opinion would not have come to him at all without them.

How sad it is to be forced to admit that the moral being is so submissive to the tyranny of the physical! And yet it must be admitted; so we will admit it and resume our narrative.

Bannière, having finished his second bottle and laid out his plan of campaign, footed up his reckoning, and found that he had used up his crown all but three sous. But as he no longer felt the need of anything except Olympe, the three sous were of no use to him; so he very majestically bestowed them upon the barmaid of the wine-shop where he had spent an hour to such good advantage.

Now the linen coat was too warm, and the dimity breeches too thick: he was too well dressed; after his soul-satisfying breakfast he needed no other clothing than his youthful ardor and his heartfelt love.

With nose in air, and hand on hip, Bannière jauntily took his way toward the Faubourg Saint-Germain, where was situated the Hôtel de Nesle, in which Monsieur de Mailly dwelt, in all probability.

There existed at this period a certain species of the *genus homo* which has since been lost to sight, as all other curious things have been since the Deluge, and as all the monstrosities of Nature were before it.

Never fear, dear reader. We have no purpose to deliver a disquisition upon mastodons, or a thesis on fossil

bones; these remarks are preliminary to nothing more than a slight digression upon Swiss indoor men.

These personages, whom we were privileged to gaze upon with awe in our infancy, whose dignity was shattered in the Revolution of 1830, and who ceased to exist as a class in the Revolution of 1848, — these personages held despotic sway over that portion of the house which separates the exterior from the interior, and they were armed sometimes with halberds and sometimes with simple disdain, as the weapon with which to carry out the orders transmitted by the first valet-de-chambre, or the favorite lady's-maid.

It was one of these Helvetian bull-dogs whom Bannière at first encountered; but the Swiss, summing up with perfect accuracy at a glance the total cost of a linen coat and dimity breeches, and estimating the whole outfit at three crowns, refused admission to Bannière in most lordly fashion.

"But, Monsieur le Suisse," said Bannière, "I asked you for Monsieur le Comte de Mailly."

"Monsieur is not within," replied the Swiss.

Bannière understood upon reflection that his linen coat and dimity breeches were the great obstacle to his entrance.

"Oh, have no fear!" said he, with as much dignity as he had ever imparted to the rôle of Hérode; "I have not come to beg."

"It makes no difference; clear out!" said the Swiss, little moved by Bannière's clear exposition of his social standing.

"I come from Monsieur de Mailly's regiment," he insisted, "and I have matters of importance to tell him. f refusing to admit me, for the consequences ıpon your head, not on mine."

The Swiss again took stock, somewhat more carefully than before, of the four or five ells of cloth which went to the making of our hero's costume.

"From the regiment?" said he, uneasily. "You say that you come from the regiment?"

"Yes."

"Oho!"

"You are wondering at my costume, are n't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, never mind that."

"Oho!"

"I am one of Monsieur de Mailly's dragoons; and as I have come on affairs of state, I disguised myself in order not to be arrested *en route*."

"Aha!" exclaimed the Swiss, almost convinced.

"Let me pass, then," said Bannière; and he made an attempt to slip between the halberd and the giant's body.

The Swiss brought the halberd to his side, and thereby blocked Bannière's passage.

"Well?" said Bannière.

"But Monsieur le Comte de Mailly really is not within."

"Upon honor?" asked Bannière.

"Upon honor! Madame alone is at home."

It was true. Bannière, who had acquired experience upon the stage in reading the eyes of his interlocutor, at once saw that the worthy Swiss was telling the truth, by the tranquillity of his expression.

"Madame," thought Bannière, "Madame! the devil! that 's not what I want."

"But, after all," he said to himself reflectively, "Madame can answer questions about Monsieur."

Thereupon he turned again to the porter.

"Very well!" said he; "that 's all right."

"What 's all right?"

"It is Madame with whom I wish to talk."

His bearing was so business-like that the Swiss no longer hesitated.

Summoning Madame's maid, for whom he had a special bell in his office, he informed her as soon as she appeared that a messenger, who had arrived in great haste from Lyons, where Monsieur de Mailly's regiment was stationed, desired to speak with the countess.

In this way did Bannière, at ten o'clock in the morning, procure admission to the impenetrable sanctuary of a woman.

XLV.

MONSIEUR BANNIÈRE DISCOVERS INEXHAUSTIBLE RESOURCES IN HIS LINEN COAT.

MADAME DE MAILLY, a lovely person, with bright black eyes, curly hair, a soft, dark complexion, and in whom the severest critic of the time could find no other blemish than a lack of fulness in her cheeks, had married, as we said in an earlier chapter, Monsieur le Comte de Mailly, the lover of Olympe.

She was one of the five Mesdemoiselles de Nesle, who were destined, as every one knows, to cut a great figure in their day.

The four others were Madame de la Tournelle, Madame de Flavacourt, Madame de Vintimille, and Madame de Lauraguais.

All were beautiful; some were more beautiful than Madame la Comtesse de Mailly, but not one of them had the charm which Nature and training had bestowed so lavishly upon the countess's whole being. A woman is not always beloved because she is the fairest; there are charms which take precedence of personal comeliness.

Madame de Mailly was worthy to be adored.

Bannière's first thought, as he was admitted to her presence, was of the powerful influence such a woman might exert over men who were the most difficult to move.

The countess, on her side, as her glance fell upon the youth, experienced a strange sensation as she observed the contrast between his bearing and his costume.

"How absurdly he is dressed!" she said aside to her maid; "and why this disguise?"

The maid looked Bannière over knowingly, and shook her head.

"Monsieur de Mailly's men are carefully selected," she said, "if the whole regiment is built upon the pattern of this specimen."

The fact is that the countess's first thought had been, strangely enough, that if Bannière were suitably clothed, he would be a very agreeable object to look upon.

At sight of a good-looking man the most modest woman almost always finds some thoughts come creeping into her mind which she does not confide to her husband, and often not to her confessor.

"Well, my friend," said the countess, very pleasantly, "you asked to speak with me?"

"Yes, Madame la Comtesse," replied Bannière.

"What do you want to say to me?"

"A secret which compels me to beg Madame la Comtesse to grant me a private interview."

People of the world are naturally suspicious. The extraordinary costume, the perfect courtesy, the perfumed honey which the lips of a dragoon are not wont to exhale, but which came from Bannière's lips, arrested the countess's good-nature just when it was about to expand as it might in a woman without rank.

"This fellow," she thought, "is no dragoon; he bows too well."

She winked at her maid in a fashion which meant, "Remain in the room, Mademoiselle;" and the maid therefore remained.

Bannière, who had cast several sidelong glances at her as if to give her leave to withdraw, without regard to her mistress, determined not to utter a word or move a

finger in her presence, and stood in one spot, motionless as a milestone, dumb as a fish.

We must not forget, in order to the understanding of certain mysteries, which become no mysteries at all if we go back to the past, that this tale is almost contemporaneous with the Regency, and that the lovely young women of that epoch, queens of love and pleasure, knew, when they chose to remember, how many times and in what fashion the Lauzuns in the last century and the Richelieus in this had disguised themselves as a means of gaining admission to their presence.

Madame de Mailly, then, guided amiss by ordinary female instinct, fancied that she saw in this mute individual an aspirant for her favor more audacious than others, and more clever too,—in other words, more dangerous; and she began to knit her brows. Lovely as she was, she became almost ugly, so inimical is virtue to beauty,—such annoyance does Minerva cause Venus, as the Abbé de Bernis, whose madrigals were just beginning to be fashionable, might have said.

"If you have come here for no other purpose than to stand there in front of me as you are doing, and without a word to say for yourself," said the countess, coldly, "be good enough to return whence you came, Monsieur, and don't disturb me again."

The word "Monsieur," was pronounced with an inflection which betokened the most abrupt dismissal that ever disguised gallant received.

But Bannière was not moved by it in the slightest degree.

"Madame," he replied, bowing, "I am, upon my honor, a dragoon of Monsieur le Comte's regiment. My name is Bannière, and God forbid that I should have the slightest purpose of insulting you!"

"Speak, then. You have some favor to ask at the hands of Monsieur de Mailly, have you not? and you hope to obtain it through my intercession? Speak, then; when I ask you to speak, you must do so, quickly and clearly."

"In that case, Madame, all that I have to ask is the simple question where I may find Monsieur de Mailly."

"For what purpose do you wish to find Monsieur de Mailly?" asked the countess.

Bannière had not anticipated that question, although he should have done so. Thus his imagination, instead of suggesting some pretext, failed him completely.

"Allow me to remain silent, Madame," said he.

"If you need to see Monsieur le Comte de Mailly for some purpose which you cannot divulge to his wife, you should not have come to his wife to ask his address. Adieu, Monsieur."

At this point Bannière began to lack tact as well as imagination. He adopted a violent course with Madame de Mailly, just as he had done with the Greeks.

"Madame," he cried, "I am seeking Monsieur de Mailly because he has robbed me of my dearest possession."

"What can Monsieur de Mailly have robbed you of?"

"A woman!"

The countess started.

Bannière imagined, in his innocent, ignorant heart, that by making such a revelation to her he should arouse her to irritation against her husband, and thus loosen her tongue.

He had based his calculations upon a grisette, and not upon a great lady.

"What woman?" the countess asked.

"Mademoiselle Olympe! that is to say, my life and my soul!"

The countess shuddered at the flames which shot from Bannière's eyes, while the soubrette avowed ingenuously to her own heart that if her name were Mademoiselle Olympe, Bannière would not have had to run after her,— very far, at all events.

"Who is this Mademoiselle Olympe?" continued the countess, determined to probe the matter to the bottom, and to use such parts of the revelation as suited her purpose and let the rest go.

"An actress, Madame."

Madame de Mailly shrugged her shoulders, with an expression of lofty scorn impossible to describe; then in a tone which the most skilful student of womankind would have been unable to interpret according to its true signification, she said, —

"You are either a madman or a liar."

Bannière was overwhelmed.

"Madman! liar!" he cried.

"Just so, Monsieur, for none but a madman would make such statements to a woman about her husband if they are true; and if they are false, why then, as I just said, you are a liar."

"Oh, you are right, Madame!" said Bannière; "yes, I am mad with love."

The countess glanced at Bannière out of the corner of her eye, shrugged her shoulders again, and entered her bedroom.

Bannière rushed after her.

She stopped upon the threshold, and turned her head so as to look at him over her shoulder.

"Ah!" she exclaimed dryly, with a freezing glance quite capable of breaking off all the magnetic currents which run from the zenith to the nadir.

Bannière, in despair at the impending utter failure of

his mission, felt a growing impulse which urged him on; the soubrette did all that she could with her two little hands to drag him away from the spot where he had been guilty of such a monumental piece of doltishness.

He yielded to the exertions of the soubrette, who was desirous to be as sympathetic as her mistress had been cruel. At the door she comforted poor Bannière with a pressure of the hand and these words, —

"You had better go. Madame does not believe you because she has a heart of stone; but I with my soft heart, — alas! I believe and pity you."

Bannière made no reply; he left the house in a state of mental depression, seeing nothing before him on earth save the abyss into which his happiness had fallen.

The stomach no longer performed its cheering functions; the ungrateful organ had gone through the process of digesting, and in the course of that process had forgotten.

It would be difficult, even for a much more eloquent pen than ours to describe the frame of mind in which the unhappy Bannière found himself after this scene.

His hope had vanished, — not of finding Monsieur de Mailly; oh, no, nothing was easier than that, for he had but to wait at the door of his hotel, *pardieu!* he was sure to return there some day or other: but to find Monsieur de Mailly was not to find Olympe; and to fail to find her was, in Bannière's estimation, a fate far worse than death.

The worst feature of the situation was that the more deeply he pondered, the more profound was his despondency, — no money, consequently no resource.

He fell into a state of prostration more complete in proportion as his joy had been more expansive.

Suddenly something like a ray of light passed over his face, but it was more sad than joyous.

"I have my ruby," he said; "it is worth, at least, three hundred pistoles; I can borrow a hundred upon it. I will have a document proving my possession of it drawn up in proper form by a notary,— something unimpeachable and not to be doubted. With the money I will find Olympe, and will take her with me to the notary, and show her the ruby, if meanwhile I have not been able to redeem it."

In another moment he thought better of that scheme.

"Oh," he cried, "to risk the loss of my ruby, the only proof which I possess of my love and my absolute devotion to the service of my mistress! To intrust the precious ring to other hands than my own! No, I was mad to think of such a thing. Is it not quite possible for a pawnbroker to become bankrupt and fly the country? May not a Jew be arrested and imprisoned, and his property confiscated? May not a notary's house be burned down, or his chest robbed? *Dame!* such things have been seen, and there are even well-known notaries in his Majesty's galleys at Toulon and Brest. And then, before a notary I should be obliged to give my whole name and my history,— Jacques Bannière, runaway from the Jesuit convent at Avignon, deserter from the dragoon barracks at Lyons. Impossible! However, it's decided, whether or no; I have got my ruby again, and it shall never go out of my hands."

He pressed it in amorous folly to his lips, and sought upon its cold surface the warmth of the kisses which Olympe had imprinted upon it in days gone by.

The mere thought of parting with the bawble, for a month, for a day, or even for one short hour only, so horrified him that he beat his breast, — a reminiscence of his old monkish habit.

The linen coat received the blow. It was very thin,

the poor coat, and like swaddling-clothes adapted itself to all the contortions of the body. But under the blow which Bannière dealt it with his fist, it assumed an attitude of resistance, and the flimsy stuff did duty as a shield for the heart.

Bannière felt an unusual thickness in the lining. We beg the reader's pardon for leading him astray when we said in the lining, for the coat had none. We should have said that Bannière felt something like a lining in one spot.

He investigated with a sensation of surprise not unmixed with awe; he investigated, and discovered, sewn on the inside of the linen, just at the location of the heart, a square piece of white cloth, bearing some resemblance to the patches which serve to repair the ravages of time in garments hoary with age.

"There 's a bad place," said he; "I wonder if the old-clothes woman cheated me? No; there 's thickness there, real thickness; let 's see what it means."

Ripping out the stitches with eager fingers, he found inside the square of cloth a sort of sachet-bag, made of a band of gray and a band of red satin, the whole in wretched condition, all worn out and discolored, but with a coarse figure of Saint Julien worked upon the red satin with these words,—

Ora pro nobis.

"A scapulary!" cried Bannière; "why, the coat must be enchanted! Can it be that this scapulary led to my finding a crown in the pocket, I wonder? That 's hardly probable, though, unless Saint Julien, the patron saint of travellers, is also a patron of the coat to the extent of supplying it with a crown every morning. Let 's look in the scapulary."

He proceeded to examine it with most scrupulous care.

"Empty, quite empty! A religious emblem, pure and simple, without craft or ornament!"

Two little silk ribbons were attached to the scapulary, making it evident that it was intended to hang from the neck upon the chest.

Bannière therefore devoutly suspended it around his neck, and invoking the kindly offices of good Saint Julien, under whose protection he considered himself thenceforth, he took the first street he came to without the least idea whither it would lead him. Henceforth that was none of his affair; it was for Saint Julien to direct his steps aright.

He had gone scarce a hundred feet when he noticed a number of people collected at a street-corner.

As he was in no sort of haste, he approached them to see what they were doing, and found that they were reading a theatrical poster.

Bannière heaved a woful sigh; he recalled the time when, given over entirely to his art and his love, he used to play Hérode with Olympe, and go home to supper with his Mariamne, restored to life.

What were they playing at Paris, at that famous Comédie-Française of which he had heard so much?

He stood on tiptoe to read over the heads of the people in front.

Suddenly he cried aloud.

The poster bore Olympe's name in huge letters, and announced her first appearance at the Comédie-Française for that very evening.

XLVI.

MAN PROPOSES AND GOD DISPOSES.

THE film which came over Bannière's eyes made him so dizzy that he must have fallen face forward against the poster itself, except for the resistance offered by the back of the party over whose head he had seen the fateful words.

It was, indeed, unheard of, that Saint Julien should perform miracles after this manner; the scapulary was vastly more than a treasure, since it thus fulfilled on the instant the wishes of him who possessed it, — a feat which money can only accomplish after some time has passed, and then not always.

Bannière, recovered from his vertigo, read and read again, and being convinced that he was not mistaken, that it was indeed Olympe who was to appear, and to appear that very evening, he was near dying with joy upon the spot.

The result of the discovery he had made was truly incalculably important.

In the first place Olympe was found again; in the second place Olympe was free, — for a woman, when she takes to the stage, does not wish to be kept in seclusion, nor can she be. The duty of rehearsing requires her to go abroad continually; and the only man who does not see an actress is the one who does not care to see her, or who does not know enough to watch in the neighborhood of the theatre.

Bannière ran directly to the Comédie-Française. In that way he avoided the necessity of thinking about dinner, and in his destitute plight that was the wisest thing he could do.

But it may have been because there were a great many people in Paris as curious or as penniless as he, he found a crowd already assembled at the door.

Bannière, being quite at home in the customs of the theatre, walked along the line without taking his place therein, presented himself to the doorkeeper, and asked Mademoiselle Olympe's address.

Thereupon he discovered something which he did not suspect, — that the Swiss servants of great noblemen are much to be preferred to the same species in the employ of the theatres. The experience was dearly bought; but one seldom learns anything new without paying for the increase of knowledge with the death of a hope or an illusion.

Bannière was shown out much more roughly than he had ever been in his life, for a door was slammed in his face with such violence that he was fain to renounce all hope of information from that quarter.

Had Monsieur de Mailly commended Olympe to the vigilance of the Swiss, or had she commended herself? She was quite capable of it.

Bannière studied the poster once more on the walls of the theatre. It bore in bold characters these words:

BY ORDER.

BRITANNICUS. Tragedy by M. Racine.

Mademoiselle Olympe will make her début in the rôle of JUNIE.

"By order!" Bannière read it over again; then he repeated it to himself. "By order! what does it mean?"

he asked. "Can it be that the king is responsible for my love's début? It is possible, but hardly probable. Is it Monsieur de Mailly who has caused her to return to the stage? It is not the act of an amorous man; or if of an amorous man, surely not of a jealous one."

He realized that his condition of uncertainty would last forever if he confined himself to his own imaginings; so he made inquiries of one of the idlers, whose appearance was less forbidding than that of his friend the doorkeeper.

"Monsieur," he asked, "can you explain to me the occasion of this function which is in preparation?"

"To be sure."

"If you can, you will do me a great favor."

"Monsieur," replied the lounger, "you must know that our dear little king has been ill?"

"Yes, indeed, Monsieur; and very dangerously. I did know it, as you say; and the proof is that, like all good Frenchmen, I had a taper burned for his convalescence."

"Ah! very good, Monsieur!"

"I did only my duty, Monsieur; but to return, if you please, to this performance —"

"Oh, yes! the king is better, Monsieur, and this evening he is to appear at the play. It is his first visit to the theatre since his illness. You can imagine what a throng will attend to see him and applaud him, especially as his presence is coincident with an important début."

"Yes, that of Mademoiselle Olympe; I see that on the bill. Do you know this Olympe, Monsieur?"

"Not personally. I am a draper in Rue Tiquetonne, Monsieur, and do not affect the society of women of that class."

"But have you heard nothing about her?"

"I have heard that she came from Lyons, where she has had great success, and that she was expected to make an even greater hit here in Paris; and as I have considerable curiosity to see this Columbine, I will take my place in the line, with your permission, Monsieur."

"I share your interest so thoroughly," said Bannière, "that I think I will fall into the line too."

He suited the action to the word, without duly considering the fact that he had not a sou in his pocket, and hurriedly joined one of the groups, thus helping to form one of the vertebræ of that creature with a movable backbone which is called the public, and whose tail, like that of the monster evoked by Theseus, is sometimes twisted into tortuous folds, sometimes stretches out like an endless serpent, and sometimes — too often, alas! — presents to the view of the spectator naught but three or four rings, — very slender ones too.

On this occasion it was a veritable Python, with incredible elaborations.

Bannière, when he was fairly encased in the vertebra of the monster, thought more seriously than he had done hitherto of his poverty, which was no better than absolute destitution.

But he reasoned after the following fashion: —

"Everybody can't get in; there will be a row, and a jolly one too. In the scrimmage there will be plenty of opportunities to thump the Gardes-Françaises, and that same insolent doorkeeper, whose halberd I vow to break over his back the first chance I have, and I hope that that chance is near at hand. The result will be that a lot of idiots will be unable to get into the theatre, although they are ready to pay, but that many clever fellows who care little about keeping their linen coats intact, like myself for instance, will succeed in fighting

their way in for nothing, and will find scores of good seats in the pit."

This line of reasoning, our readers must agree, was not so very illogical for a man who was hungry and in love. If Bannière under such circumstances had adopted any different course, he would have belied all his practical and theoretical knowledge of things theatrical; especially would he have run counter to the all-powerful mediation of great Saint Julien, whose scapulary he wore upon his breast.

Meanwhile, behind Bannière and the lounger with whom he had the conversation we have reported, the crowd, like a ram with many horns, began to butt against the doors of the Comédie-Française, which asked no better fate than to be carried by storm; and so they were, as soon as the box-office was opened.

For five minutes all went well; but at the end of that time the impetuosity of the crowd, abetted by a number of arguments similar to that which Bannière had used upon himself, began to have their effect upon the general good order which had been maintained up to that time. Bannière, with unspeakable delight, saw that about ten paces ahead of him fisticuffs had begun to be exchanged with such regularity that they might be expected to continue.

At this crisis, as at most other times, Bannière had reason to congratulate himself upon his height, thanks to which he could see hats flying about, and the levelled gun-barrels of the archers, who were hustled about in the hurly-burly, and swayed this way and that, like the poor willows during the fierce squalls of spring and autumn.

Only ten minutes more of fighting on the part of the advance guard, and a like period of patient waiting on the part of the centre where Bannière was, and his triumph was certain.

The ten minutes passed, and matters turned out much better even than he expected. The tempest became a cyclone, and the guards were forced back, and disappeared like wisps of straw in the clutches of a whirlwind.

There was nothing more to do but to push his way in; there was no need even of breaking anything over the doorkeeper's shoulders.

But our readers must have noticed one thing, and that is that bright ideas fly about in the air like flocks of birds, so that when a man has a bright idea, and naturally thinks that he has it all to himself, he is sure to see it acted upon by somebody else, just as he was about to avail himself of it.

Thanks to the battle which was raging at the door, and in which the armed force had been worsted, more than forty men, who had the advantage over Bannière and his friend of having taken their places in the line ahead of them, had already reached the porch without having occasion to put their hands into their purses.

Bannière's turn came at last; he calculated that in another minute, in a second, he too would have passed under the blessed porch; he was already preparing for a spring to overthrow the last two lines which separated him from the entrance, when these same lines, which were wavering and almost in a panic, like the famous column of Fontenoy before the charge of Monsieur de Richelieu, suddenly turned upon Bannière and forced him back to the gutter.

It was not till then that he saw that the doorkeeper whom he had thumped so soundly in his fancy, had been to seek reinforcements and had found them; that the defeated archers had multiplied, as the soldiers grew from the dragon's teeth of Cadmus; that the Gardes-

Françaises did not consider themselves beaten by a simple repulse; and that sundry, very determined-looking bayonets, very straight and very numerous, had driven out those would-be spectators who had gone beyond their rights, and were advancing in good order to discipline the others. This check, however, was not calculated to discourage a combatant so interested in the fight, and consequently so implacable, as Bannière. A resolution like his does not surrender to a few pieces more or less of flesh and blood or of cold steel.

Therefore he was obstinate, and instead of falling back, as most of his neighbors did, his energy increased twofold, and, like a true soldier, he constituted himself commander-in-chief of a mob of mutineers, who yelled *Vive le Roi!* with all their might, and undertook to carry the doors and barriers of the theatre by storm.

The good example set by Bannière emboldened all the fugitives, who turned about when they saw that the day was not hopelessly lost, and who rallied around their new leader, and made a path through the ranks of the archers and police, crying, *Vive le Roi!* more frequently than ever, — an ingenious bit of tactics, always employed by insurgents, whereby the disturbers of the peace sought to make it appear that they were breaking down barriers, bursting open doors, and assassinating guards for no other purpose than to demonstrate their zeal and their affection for his Majesty Louis XV., who was still called at this period "Louis the Well-Beloved."

But, unhappily, as we have learned in our own days of revolution, nothing imparts so much force and obstinacy to the bayonets of the troops as the resistance of plain, every-day citizens.

There has been of all time most intense emulation between the citizen's coat and the uniform, in the direc-

tion of inflicting annoyance upon each other, and tearing each other to pieces.

The uniforms, then, did horrible execution among the coats, and we can easily understand that Bannière's unsubstantial garment, which was at the centre of peril, was not spared.

After all, however, it was stubborn to the point of ferocity; in itself alone it was as good as a whole army. The valor and wrath and devotion which it displayed on that field would have sufficed to win for the Romans the three battles of Trébie, Trasimène, and Cannæ.

Nevertheless God was on the side of the battalions. Numbers carried the day. Ten or twelve archers gave their undivided earnest attention to the gallant youth, who deserved to have been better supported, or attacked with a smaller force.

Thereupon — and it was a grievous sight to see — the hapless coat which had hitherto avoided such rough scenes was torn to tatters by their vindictive hands.

Bannière, who in spite of everything, and like those whose good luck he had envied, had succeeded in forcing his way into the vestibule of the theatre, saw that he would be quartered alive if he continued to shower blows with feet and hands, to right and left, in front and in rear, as he had been doing; so he clung with feet and hands to a pillar, as if he would have uprooted it; and then there was enacted under that porch a scene which was certainly more curious than that which the lovers of sound literature had come thither to witness.

He yelled *Vive le Roi!* did poor Bannière, with such vehemence that his cry became a roar. He embraced the stone column with such power that the archers abandoned the attempt to break his hold upon it.

One would have said he was one of those pieces of

sculpture of the Middle Ages with which the architects of the cathedrals of Strasburg and Cologne adorned the huge pillars of those structures.

Alas! why cannot such instances of courage and devotion, like that of Cynegirus at Salamis, be allowed to triumph, that posterity may gaze upon the gratifying spectacle of virtue rewarded!

But it was not to be. A commissioner appeared, made inquiries, looked about, and instead of subscribing to the general sentiment of admiration which enveloped Bannière's glorious defence like a halo, issued, in that shrill voice which is characteristic of officials of his class, certain clear and concise orders in these words, —

"Archers, take that man, alive or dead, and bring him before me."

Bannière, understanding the significance of "alive or dead," and knowing as he did that resistance to the orders of a commissioner had more than once been followed by strangulation, or torture quite capable of causing death, — Bannière, who was willing to fight against superior force, but did not care to offend the majesty of the law, untwined his feet, straightened out the joints of his fingers which were clinched around the pillar, and put himself in the hands of his persecutors, as an oak which has already been uprooted by a tempest bends and sways and falls before the first breath of air.

The commissioner had withdrawn to his den, and the archers escorted Bannière thither, — some holding him by the wrists, while others pushed him with a will from behind. He was well acquainted with that process which seemed to be part of the tactics of all the archers in France. It was the same which had already been put in force upon him when he was taken to prison from Olympe's house at Lyons.

Having learned prudence by experience, and remembering his former arrest, Bannière, upon the pretext of rearranging in consonance with the demands of decency certain portions of his attire which had suffered tremendously, drew his precious ring from his finger and quietly slipped it into his mouth.

It will be noticed that in all the troublous periods of his life Bannière's first thought was for the ruby. The feat was performed to his entire satisfaction, and no one remarked it.

Thus Bannière, hustled and frowned upon by fate, was haled before the commissioner, who was preparing all his eloquence and the thunderbolts of his wrath for the process of questioning him.

When the *mise-en-scène* was all arranged, the inquiry began.

Bannière listened calmly to the questions which were put to him in the peevish tone and with the absurd pedantry which distinguish Messieurs the Commissioners of Police of the fair kingdom of France. But, as we have said, Bannière had his ring in his mouth; he was afraid that if he should put it between his teeth and his cheek and try to talk, it might fall out and betray itself; so he kept it in the centre of his mouth on his tongue,— which means, of course, that he did not speak. For it is quite impossible to speak with a jewel upon the tongue; and thus, as will be seen, we prove the falsity of the fabulous verses in which the poets speak of pearls and gold issuing forth with every word. Homer, apropos of the aged Nestor, mentions only honey as flowing from the lips of the King of Pylos, and leaves to Hesiod, less severely accurate than he in matters philosophical, the chains of gold which drop from the lips of Eloquence.

Nothing, then, came from Bannière's mouth, and we

know why; but the commissioner, who was far from suspecting the reason, thinking that his obstinate silence was caused by sullenness, got tired of putting questions which evoked no response whatever, and, in accordance with his undoubted right, committed Bannière to prison.

The same archers took him away to the For l'Evêque, — the poor boy, but recently so full of fire and energy, now walking along with dull eye and bent head, like the coursers of Hippolytus.

XLVII.

LOVE-MADNESS.

NOTHING of moment occurred on the way. Bannière continued to maintain absolute silence, much to the astonishment of the archers, who had heard him shouting, *Vive le Roi!* so vigorously.

They took him to the For l'Evêque, as has been said, and entered his name upon the books with the customary formalities.

During the process of registration he said no more than he had said before the commissioner and on the way to the prison.

Once regularly registered and locked up, he breathed more freely, took the ring from his mouth, and hid it in a little hole in his wall (the king's wall, we should say); then he drew his cot in front of the hole and lay down upon it, so as not to lose sight of the ring even in his sleep, as Monsieur de la Palisse, who said so many good things, might have said.

It was not without reason that he acted as he did, for they searched him with the utmost care — no very difficult task, by the way, as he was more than half naked.

They were especially diligent in scrutinizing the scapulary, which was seen to be empty and harmless, and was looked upon with some awe, as such articles commonly were in those days, when the archers still believed in the religion for which it was their duty to enforce respect, although perhaps the priests had ceased to believe in it.

This time it was no mere commissioner who undertook to interrogate Bannière, but a magistrate of the Châtelet; it was an imposing ceremony.

Up to that time Bannière had said very little; but from that time on he talked too much.

"Your name?"

"Bannière."

"Your age?"

"Twenty-five years."

"Your occupation?"

"I have none."

"Your dwelling-place?"

"I have none yet, for I only reached Paris this morning."

"Your means of existence?"

Bannière held out his arms, — a famous means of existence! The archers knew a thing or two about them, and could certify to it if need were.

"Why did you fight with the guard?"

"Because they prevented my going into the theatre."

"What were you going to do there?"

"*Pardieu!* to see the play."

"But they searched you, and you had no money."

At this point Bannière was embarrassed, even more so than he had been with Madame de Mailly, for this time, instead of making a foolish reply, he could think of no reply at all; and yet with a little presence of mind, the reply would almost have suggested itself, — he had only to point to the numerous gaping wounds in his coat, and say, —

"Do you suppose my purse would remain long in a coat torn like that?"

That manner of reply would also have indicated a purpose to claim damages and interest.

But Bannière never thought of the lie, simple as it would have been.

He stood overwhelmed with confusion by the statement of the magistrate. We ought, however, to tell the whole truth to the end that the reader may not make Bannière out to be a worse idiot than he really was.

While the magistrate was at work upon him, Bannière's mind was occupied exclusively with the possible means of escaping from the prison.

This desire manifested itself very suddenly, and just when the magistrate least expected it.

"What time is it?" he demanded of that functionary, who looked at him in utter amazement.

"What to do?" he retorted banteringly.

"What to do? *Parbleu!* to go back to the Comédie, of course!" cried Bannière.

The judge looked at the archers.

"Come, quick, quick!" almost shouted Bannière; "I may still be there in time to hear Junie say, 'Oh, my prince;' and that is the moment of all others when I should like to see her. Olympe was so lovely, so pathetic, so touching!"

"What's that!" exclaimed the judge.

"Hurry, for God's sake!" Bannière went on; "for if you delay any longer, I shall never get there in time to hear her say, — to Agrippine, you know: 'Pardon this transport, Madame!'"

"The deuce take me!" stammered the magistrate, "but what in God's name is the matter with this fellow?"

"Come, have you finished?" continued Bannière, in a tone which indicated a renewed outbreak of the rage which he had held a moment in restraint.

"Look here! cried the judge, gazing at Bannière

with a sort of terror, "are you mad? Why, I had made up my mind that you were almost innocent, and was just about to show some indulgence — "

"*Parbleu!*" said Bannière, "it would be much better than to treat me rigorously. Have I done anything wrong? They beat me, tore my new coat to tatters, and my dimity breeches which I was wearing for the second time only, and all because I wanted to see the performance, and was crying, *Vive le Roi!*"

"Yes, and he was shouting it out in great shape too," said an archer; "we must do him that justice."

"He seems not to be a bad man, and he expresses himself very well," said the judge.

"Quick, then, quick, open the doors," cried Bannière, "since I am entirely innocent!"

"But," the judge added, "he is mad!"

"Mad! I! Nonsense!"

"Be calm and we will see."

"You tell me to be calm!"

"Yes."

"But I tell you that she will be leaving the stage."

"Who?"

"Junie."

"Who's Junie?"

"Junie! ten thousand devils! Do you mean to prevent me from seeing her when she leaves the stage?"

"Oho! the attack is coming on again," said the magistrate, glancing at the archers, as if to make sure in advance of their courage in case that he should have to call upon them.

"Look, my little judge!" said Bannière; "now she will be undressing."

"Who, pray?"

"Why, Junie!"

"Junie undressing!" exclaimed the scandalized official.

"Of course, yes! Do you suppose that she will go home in her tunic and her peplum?"

"Well! what is that to me, I should like to know?"

"But it is much to me; I have no more than time by running to meet her when she leaves the theatre. Let me go."

"Certainly he is a madman!" said the judge.

"He 's a madman!" echoed the archers, delighted to agree with the judge.

"A madman of the erotic variety!" the magistrate added.

"And yet," one of the archers ventured to say, "I saw him arrange his dishevelled clothes with great care."

"Oh, he has lucid moments," said the judge.

Bannière started toward the door; the archers, at a sign from the magistrate, held him back, and the struggle began again.

The archers forced him down upon the flags, and while they held him there with three sturdy pairs of arms, the magistrate walked around him, gazing at him with interest mingled with curiosity.

"Messieurs," said he, "this man is afflicted with one of those mental maladies which physicians call love-madness. It is sometimes very dangerous, and a careful watch must be kept upon him."

Having delivered this judgment, the magistrate muttered a few words, wrote a few others on a piece of paper which he handed to the chief of the archers, and made his escape, not without enjoining upon the four to keep Bannière in the same recumbent position until he was outside the door.

Bannière, who had not taken his eyes from him, had grown more excited rather than calmer, had threatened

him, and even struck at him. His madness, alas! was a sort of love-madness, although not of that variety which the judge had in mind.

When that functionary had taken his departure, they released Bannière's legs, but continued to hold fast to his arms.

"Come, my boy," said their leader, "get up now with good grace."

"Get up? We are going — "

"We are going to see Julie," said the archer, who had understood him to use that French name instead of the Latin name used by Monsieur Racine.

Bannière leaped to his feet, thinking that he was really to be set at liberty. He was careful to resume possession of Olympe's ring; and he slipped it into the scapulary, — a perfectly safe hiding-place thenceforth, so thoroughly had it been searched.

He was quite right to hide the ring so cleverly, poor Bannière; for after taking many steps in the streets of Paris, in a direction which was not that of the Comédie-Française, so far as he could judge, the archers put him into a fiacre, and said to the driver, —

"To Charenton."

An hour later Bannière and his escort alighted in front of a large house. As he was led through a wicket, his name was entered (upon information furnished by the archers, for Bannière refused to answer questions, understanding nothing of what was going on) as an "Erotomaniac."

The archers took their leave, and left him to himself. Upon the strength of the report of the magistrate who had questioned him, he had been committed to an asylum for the insane.

As he was still in a state of rebellion against the

frightful persecution to which he was subjected by fate, there came strong men who bound him hand and foot, and cast him into a cold cell, where they left him alone with his despair, which was sweetened by only one circumstance, — that in all his misfortunes he still had Olympe's ring.

XLVIII.

HOW IT HAPPENED THAT MONSIEUR DE MAILLY RETURNED TO OLYMPE.

MEANWHILE the theatrical performance which had such deplorable results for Bannière, had turned out more satisfactorily for the peaceable spectators who had paid for their seats.

The king had arrived at the appointed time. He had taken his place in his box amid the joyful shouts which can be explained only by the insensate affection which at that time reigned in the hearts of all the subjects of his Most Christian Majesty.

Louis XV. had just passed his eighteenth year. He was in the very bloom of youth, in the very flower of his beauty. He had been the loveliest child in France; he was the most beautiful youth in the world.

In addition, no man possessed in such perfection grace united with nobility of demeanor.

The potent charm which he wielded over the whole nation, which saw in the peaceful beginning of his reign the glorious dawn of a long period of repose and of unbounded prosperity, may be explained by the incessant dread by which the people had long been oppressed, on account of his feeble health, always threatened, so said the friends of Madame de Maintenon, by Monsieur d'Orléans and his confederates.

But Monsieur d'Orléans had died, loyally performing the trust which God had given him, of preserving for

France this slender lily swaying upon its stalk; he had died bequeathing to the French people the trust which he had received from God.

At last this royal youth, the object of such anxious solicitude, had arrived at man's estate. He was sufficiently vigorous in health to reassure his anxious subjects, yet frail enough to be interesting still.

His pallor, the result of a sickness from which he had risen as from the tomb, was an additional reason for loving and admiring and applauding him more than they had ever done in ordinary times. Never, in very truth, had his eyes shone with a gentler flame, never had his beautiful white hands appeared more caressing and delicate, to the enchanted gaze of the ladies.

When the enthusiastic reception accorded by the Parisians to their idol was at an end, they began to pay some little attention to what was taking place upon the stage.

It was indeed Olympe who took the part of Junie. The poster which Bannière had perused, and which had led him straight away to Charenton, had told naught but the truth.

Perhaps the time has arrived to give our readers some account of what had taken place previously. Of the events which we have narrated covering Monsieur de Mailly's return to Olympe, and her departure from Lyons, we have seen only the surface; let us look a little deeper than that.

A marriage, as we have already said, had been arranged, under the auspices of the king, between Louis Alexandre de Mailly, and Mademoiselle Louise Julie de Nesle, his cousin. It was one of those alliances which unite great fortunes, which bind closer the ties of blood relationship, which are arranged between the heads of

families, and which the young people concerned almost never rebel against, because they combine all the advantages of good-fellowship at least, if not of true happiness.

It should also be said that a marriage at that epoch was a much less serious affair than in our day. People married then to have heirs to inherit their fortunes and to perpetuate their race.

To reach these two results it was sufficient, from the husband's standpoint, to have one son; now this son, the first born, the husband could almost always be sure was really his, unless the wife was extraordinarily wanton. With that assurance it mattered little to him who begot her other children, for they did not bear his name or share in his fortune. One was put into the army, and another into the Church; it was "Monsieur le Chevalier" or "Monsieur l'Abbé." See Molière, for instance; Molière, who died of jealousy, — Molière, clever delineator of the morals of his days, — never once makes use of the word *adultère*. It is a French word, it is true, but a poetical word, like *coursier* (courser) instead of *cheval* (horse), or *flamme* (flame) instead of *amour* (love), or like *trépas* (demise) instead of *mort* (death). The ordinary word in common use is *cocuage* (cuckoldry),— that is to say, the word which conveys only the idea of absurdity. Of this double masque, which wears, like Janus, the double face of marriage, one sees only that which laughs; the face which expresses grief, which is furrowed with tears and contorted with despair, remains in the shadow, and no one ever sees it, except perhaps the husband, when in the privacy of his own apartment, alone with his thoughts, he lays aside the other, and looks at himself in the reproachful mirror of memory.

To-day it is quite different: cuckoldry has become adultery; the fault has become a crime. Has society

improved in morality? Yes, at first sight; we maintain that it is so, and it would not be hard to prove it. Then the law came in, and took a hand in enforcing morality; the law abolished *majorats*, rights of primogeniture and trusts; the law decreed the equal division of the father's property among all his children. No more cloisters for the daughters, no more boarding-schools for younger sons; all have the same origin, hence all ought to have equal rights.

From the moment that the husband came to see that his children had, under the law, equal rights to his inheritance, he chose that they should have equal natural rights; and from that moment *adultère* (adultery) became the real word,—that is to say, synonymous with crime for the parents and with deprivation of rights for the child. That is how the nineteenth century came to take seriously the word which the eighteenth had taken only in joke; that is why Molière wrote "Georges Dandin," and I, "Antony."

The Nesle and Mailly families had arranged one of these marriages in the persons of the two cousins whose names and prefixes we have duly set forth. Monsieur de Mailly had left Avignon for that purpose, had come to Paris, and married his fair cousin in about the same length of time that Cæsar used in whipping the King of Pontus. He came, he saw, and he conquered.

Madame de Mailly was a lovely young woman of some seventeen or eighteen years. I know that there has been much discussion about her age; but we maintain that she was born in 1710, that is to say, the same year as the king.

We drew her portrait when Bannière was ushered into her presence, and consequently have no need to draw it now.

Monsieur de Mailly had known his cousin from childhood, so that it would have been difficult for any new sentiment to be born of their closer union; they were both young and both beautiful, and we are glad to believe that there was nothing positively distasteful to either in their new estate.

But Monsieur de Mailly, accustomed as he was to Olympe's gracious and delicate attentions, soon began to draw comparisons between the wife he had taken and the mistress he had deserted, entirely to the advantage of the latter. In addition, Monsieur de Mailly had discovered in his new wife a tendency to melancholy and to self-absorption; one would have said that some strange sentiment, which she was concealing from all others, and from herself too, perhaps, was working at the bottom of the young woman's heart, concealed in some dark invisible corner, and revealed its existence only by that sharp sting which every partially stilled passion makes every time that it awakes.

Now, as there was no criticism to be made upon Madame de Mailly's conduct, and as Monsieur de Mailly, after carefully studying the tone of voice and the expression with which his wife talked, not only with those friends whom he had introduced to her, but with all the noblemen she met at court, had become convinced of his wife's cold demeanor to all alike, he had decided that she was naturally cold, and had not demanded of her, despite his jealous disposition, any further assurances than she had volunteered to give him.

But he found, nevertheless, that as Madame de Mailly's husband, something was lacking of the happiness he had known with Olympe.

Whenever his heart felt a breath of sadness, it turned instinctively toward Olympe, and a sigh would wing its

way from Paris to seek that lovely being wherever she might be.

At last he arrived at the stage of regretting her so bitterly, and of missing her so seriously, despite all his efforts to forget her, that he determined to make the journey which all his sighs had made one after another, and to do what his sighs had been unable to do, — bring Olympe back to Paris.

But would he find Olympe free? Would she consent to go with him? Would she consent to take up with him again after he had deserted her? That was the question, as Hamlet says.

But such questions propounded to a man's self-esteem are soon answered. Where in the provinces could Olympe find a cavalier sufficiently accomplished to make her forget Monsieur de Mailly? In Paris itself, in whose favor the regent had decentralized Versailles, — in Paris, the very centre of beauty and fashion, Monsieur de Mailly was esteemed a handsome and fashionable cavalier. So of course Olympe could have found nothing equal to what she had lost, and equally of course she must still be sighing regretfully for those two happy years as Monsieur de Mailly was himself sighing for them.

Now Olympe, being in such a frame of mind, and she could be in no other, would regard his return as a piece of great good-fortune, which she might long for but would not dare to expect.

However, every contingency must be provided for, and it might be that Olympe, in despair at his desertion, and renouncing all hope of a dramatic career at Paris which he and she had so often discussed, had made an engagement with some provincial manager; in that event the engagement must be cancelled, — a very simple thing to do, for an order to appear at the Comédie-Française overrode all other engagements.

Monsieur de Mailly procured such an order from the first gentleman of the chamber, and started for Lyons with it in his pocket.

Although he really counted upon Olympe's love and her fidelity to the souvenirs of the past, he was not sorry, by way of rekindling her love and confirming her in her fidelity, to present himself as her patron, and to arouse a feeling of gratitude in addition to the other sentiments which Olympe had doubtless preserved for him.

We have seen under what circumstances Monsieur de Mailly arrived at Lyons; how he had found Olympe in despair, and how in her despair she had given herself back to him.

Bannière's liberty was the result at least, if not the condition, of her return to her former allegiance, which had almost driven the poor boy mad when she bluntly announced it to him in his cell.

Monsieur de Mailly, then, had found Olympe, if not happy to go with him, happy to leave Lyons, and to seek in her work upon the stage, and the studying she would have to do, some distraction for that love for Bannière which she had believed to be destroyed by contempt, but which was in reality overshadowed for the moment by jealousy.

And what had happened? This: Olympe, after leaving Bannière, had discovered that she still loved him, and, after taking up with Monsieur de Mailly, had discovered that she cared nothing for him.

Thereupon, like a desperate woman who no longer believes in anything since she has lost her happiness, like an exile who cares for nothing since she has lost her country, Olympe had clung to the only passion which women still have when they no longer have aught to love.

She resumed her independence; and that to her meant the stage.

Thereupon Monsieur de Mailly, who had seen what was going on in her poor heart, had tried to keep Olympe entirely to himself by inducing her to abandon all thought of a dramatic career, and not to use the order to appear with which he had armed himself with contrary intent; but Olympe, wounded in the depths of her heart, and unable to hold any one responsible for the wound, had said, —

"Not to Bannière, nor to Monsieur de Mailly, but to everybody, — that is to say, to nobody."

Reminding the count of the order to appear of which he had spoken when he came to Lyons, she imperiously demanded that it should be put to some use.

The count could not refuse, and the result was Olympe's début in "Britannicus."

XLIX.

MONSIEUR DE MAILLY TAKES THE WRONG ROAD.

Instead of taking note of Olympe's melancholy, and seeking for its real cause among the ideas, old or new, which ordinarily harass the other sex, Monsieur de Mailly, like all jealous men, allowed his own prejudices to run away with him.

He assumed a most gracious expression, and approaching Olympe with a jaunty air and a smile on his lips, he said, —

"Dear Olympe, you had a colossal success this evening."

"Do you think so?" said she, wiping the rouge from her cheeks.

"Moreover, my dear love, you acted the part to perfection."

"Ah!" said she, nonchalantly, "so much the better."

"Do you know," continued Mailly, "that people are talking of your talent?"

"Indeed?" rejoined Olympe, in the same tone; "and does that gratify you?"

"No, quite the contrary."

"What! quite the contrary! Why so?"

"Because there is nothing pleasant about it for me."

"What! there is nothing pleasant for you in my having talent, and people saying that I have?"

"No, indeed there is not."

"Ah! that requires explanation, do you know."

"It 's very easy to explain."

"Go on and explain, then."

"Suppose one were jealous, for instance?"

"Oh, well, in that case one would be altogether in the wrong."

"That may be," retorted Mailly, archly, "but one would suffer none the less."

"Suffer?"

"Cruelly."

"Why, *you* are not jealous, are you?"

"I hardly know."

"Bah! Of what should you be jealous?"

"What! *Mon Dieu!* I know that you love me," said the count, with that extraordinary assumption of self-possession which always denotes an absolute lack of equilibrium.

Olympe turned her head, and made a face at her mirror, which in a woman less well-bred might have passed for a grimace.

The count had something else to think of, and saw neither Olympe nor the mirror nor the grimace.

"However that may be," he continued, "I am not entirely reassured."

"What must I do, Count, to bring you to that state of mind?"

"Ah, my good Olympe, certain things which, unhappily, you will not do."

"Oh, I can do many things," said she.

"But not things which you have already refused to do."

"Women are capricious," said she.

"So that I ought not to lay aside all hope?"

"You must agree, my dear Count, that I cannot know how to reply to that until I know what you are talking about. Is it one or several things which you desire?"

"When one desires a thing from you, Olympe, it is not worth while to be modest in one's desires."

"Well, begin."

"Where shall I begin?"

"With the most important or the most difficult to grant of all the things you wish. Take the bull by the horns, as they say."

"Well, dear Olympe, would you like to make me the happiest of men?"

"I ask nothing better."

"Leave the stage."

Olympe raised her head; in her look there was a restrained fire which made the count shudder.

"What!" said she, "you come to seek me at Lyons with an order for my début, you bring me back to Paris to make my début; now I have made it, and have scored a success, and you call upon me to leave the stage the self-same evening. If I were to do that, I should be mad; if you were to make me do it, you would be mad. Off the stage, I should bore myself and you to death; trust me, and do not insist upon this, for we should both lose too much."

Monsieur de Mailly chose to insist, nevertheless.

"But, dear Olympe," said he, "you know that this is not the first time."

"Very true; I know it is not the first time you have asked this of me, and I know also that it follows that it's not the first time I have refused you. Well, I beg that it may be the last, my dear Count."

"But —"

"Oh, enough of this!" said she; "if you insist upon this, Monsieur, it is evident that you have too little esteem for me."

"Alas! dear Olympe, on the stage opportunities are so frequent!"

"Opportunities for what?"

"Why," stammered Monsieur de Mailly, startled by the cool manner in which she propounded this strange question, — "why, for being loved and falling in love."

"It is not for *my* ears, I think, that you intend what you have just said, Monsieur le Comte."

She fastened upon Monsieur de Mailly that piercing, terrible gaze which transfixes the heart, like a blade of steel.

He was somewhat overbearing by nature, and in addition he had some bad leaven in his heart that evening, the dear count. His unlucky star urged him on too.

"My dear," said he, "allow me to protest against your grand airs."

"Why so?"

"Because, unfortunately for me, it would not be the first time that you had seized one of these opportunities."

"I think you must be losing your mind, Monsieur le Comte," said Olympe. "In this connection you do not refer to Monsieur Bannière, do you?"

"Why, yes."

"Very well! it was you who made that opportunity, and I did accept it."

"You see, my good friend, it is a calamity to which I do not want you to be exposed henceforth."

"You are mistaken again, Monsieur le Comte. My friendship with Monsieur Bannière was in no sense a calamity for me; but it was most assuredly, on the other hand, a dire calamity for him."

The count saw that the conversation was becoming a duel.

He checked himself, but he was too late.

The wound, like a wasp's sting, was gradually spreading its poison through Olympe's veins.

"You are not willing to make this sacrifice for me?" said the count.

"No, Monsieur."

"Once more I ask you."

"No."

"If I were to beg, to implore you?"

"It would be useless."

He sighed.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed; "I swear to you that I have n't the least uneasiness. I know that you are the noblest of women; but though your soul is noble, your heart is capable of receiving impressions."

"Assuredly."

That word made Monsieur de Mailly shudder.

"You see," he said; "that is just what I dread."

"Oh!" said she, "when that time comes, be assured that I will tell you of it."

Another blow for the poor fellow.

"Do you know that what you promise me, while very loyal, is far from pleasant to think of, dear Olympe," said he, frowning; "for you admit the possibility of changing."

"One must admit the possibility of everything," said Olympe, calmly.

"What! admit everything! Even that your affection may change?"

"Do you know anything immutable in this world?"

"Well, admit it then; but I say that it is a great pity that you will not give me the means of combating my unhappy thoughts."

"I will grant everything except what you just asked me."

"You will give up to me in everything except the matter of the stage?" cried De Mailly, eagerly.

"In everything."

"Thanks. I begin then."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to pack up your jewels and give them to your maid."

"What for, pray?"

"To be given to my servant, who will take them —"

"Where?"

"To my little place in Rue Grange-Batelière."

"To your house?"

"Where I beg you to come and take up your abode this evening."

Olympe opened her great eyes to their fullest extent, in wonder.

"But the suite I have hired?" said she.

"It would very soon be invaded by the crowd of admirers whom you have created for yourself, while they will think a long while before coming to my house."

"So you condemn me to imprisonment?"

"Almost."

She was silent for a moment.

"You hesitate!" he cried. "Oh, Olympe!"

"*Dame!* a prison!" she muttered.

"You said, *in everything.*"

"But a prison!"

"We will gild the cage, my lovely hermit; we will try to make you regret your liberty less than anything else."

"Liberty!" murmured Olympe, with a sigh.

"One would say that you cling to it."

"Cling to it!" she ejaculated.

"Ah, Madame," said the count, "there are bad days, and I have fallen upon one of them."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am unfortunate this evening, for I have discovered in you a tendency to frigidity of demeanor, when perhaps I had the right to expect something different."

Olympe, who had fallen into a profound revery, aroused herself suddenly, and said, shaking her head,—

"Come, let us not argue any more; it tires me. You ask me to leave the stage?"

"Oh, no, no, I don't dare."

"You ask me to leave the world, then, do you not?"

"I ask you to consent at least to go with me to my little house, which you know of, and to install yourself there with your women."

"Very well, it's agreed," said she, rising; "I am off for the little house."

"But reflect," the count began.

"Reflect! you tell me to reflect! Don't speak to me of that, Count. It's agreed, I said; but it is only on condition that I shall not reflect."

"I don't want to take you there under false pretences, Olympe. If I ask you to go there to live, it is because I wish to hide you."

"Agreed."

"It is because I wish to select the people who shall visit you."

"Agreed, agreed. Count, is it your pleasure that I should not go out at all? Count, is it your pleasure that I should not see a soul? Speak, command,—or no, do not speak, I will divine your wishes."

"Olympe, you enchant me and terrify me at the same time."

"Good! good! your arm, Count, and let's be off."

The count, transported with delight, put Olympe in his carriage, which was waiting at the actors' entrance.

and told the coachman to drive to his little establishment on Rue Grange-Batelière.

Olympe said not another word; she looked, without seeing them, at the priceless objects which surrounded her, and which, Monsieur de Mailly told her, were all her own; then she sat down to supper, but ate nothing, smiled when the count spoke to her, but could not muster up a laugh. In short, she did her feverish utmost to retain an appearance of amiability until he had taken his leave.

When she was finally left alone, she dropped into a chair by the fire.

"Oh, how bored I am!" she said. A terrible word that, of which men never appreciate the full significance until it has done its work and produced its results.

Monsieur de Mailly, for his part, returned home very happy over his success in inducing Olympe to divorce herself from the excitement and noise of society. He had no suspicion, poor wretch! of the deadly enemy with whom he had left her face to face in his house on Rue Grange-Batelière.

"The battle was a hard one," he said to himself, "but the victory is mine, and I have her under my hand. The king shall not see her except at the theatre, and if he sees too much of her there, why, I will absolutely forbid her acting; my friends of the chamber will assist me."

Unhappy Monsieur de Mailly! he had sunk up to his knees in the quicksand of love, in which poor Bannière had been three quarters drowned.

L.

MONSIEUR DE RICHELIEU.

On the evening of this noteworthy performance, throughout which the king followed so attentively the character of Junie, as represented by Olympe, a momentous event took place, which came very near destroying the striking effect of the young monarch's appearance at the Comédie-Française.

The news of this event fell like a bombshell among the audience.

"Monsieur de Richelieu has returned from Vienna!"

In fact, about six in the evening, a heavily laden carriage drawn by four sturdy horses who seemed to have adopted the gallop as their ordinary gait, passed the barrier of La Villette, drove down Rue Saint-Denis to the Boulevards, turned into Rue de Richelieu, and so into the courtyard of a noble mansion on Rue Croix des Petits-Champs.

The mansion stood between the courtyard and a garden.

Hearing the noise made by the carriage, several servants with torches came running out. Some stood on the porch, others rushed to the stepping-stone and opened the door of the carriage, through which there hastily stepped out a youngish man wrapped in a cloak of sable. He acknowledged with a wave of the hand the salute of his whole household, who ran to meet him, and cried to the servant who had come with him, and had alighted

from the box: "Rafté, I am absolutely not at home to anybody except the person you know. I trust you to see that I am undisturbed."

Whereupon he entered the house and disappeared in the suite of apartments which had been made ready and heated beforehand, proving that the traveller's return was expected.

We have said enough to indicate that this traveller was Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu, who returned from his Viennese embassy in the early days of November.

It is with no purpose of offending the well-informed reader, who has followed out the court intrigues of the eighteenth century in the contemporaneous chronicles: nor is it to deserve the name of a prolix writer, that we pause here to sketch in few words the portrait of the then Duc de Richelieu, as well as several others, which were associated so closely with his, in 1728, that they seemed to be nothing more than its frame.

The Duc de Richelieu was then thirty-four; he was the handsomest man in France, as Louis XV., at eighteen was the handsomest youth. He had won notoriety by his adventures with the regent's daughter, with Mademoiselle de Charolais, Madame de Gacé, Madame de Villars, etc., etc., as well as by his threefold experiance of the Bastille as a place of abode, and by his mad antics generally; he had become a famous diplomatist, too, and had been accredited to the Emperor Charles VI., at Vienna, the object of his mission being to persuade that monarch to break off his alliance with the Queen of Spain, who advanced the claim that the crown of France should go to her family in case of the death of Louis XV.

This purpose was not easily accomplished. The Emperor Charles was a man endowed with a vast amount of cautious energy, which was little short of barbarism.

Moreover, the Austrian court was a terrible place for a man accustomed to the luxurious life of Paris, and its politics made a rough apprenticeship for one who had been trained to the frivolities of the Œil-du-Bœuf.

Vienna had, in European eyes, two claims to superiority which no one denied, — generals who had almost always whipped our generals, and diplomatists who had seldom failed to throw dust in the eyes of our diplomatists.

The Duc de Richelieu, who was capable of anything, even of a good action, as was said of him by the regent (that other man of shrewd intellect whose real worth was not appreciated until he was succeeded by the Duc de Bourbon), fulfilled his mission with honor, and returned from Vienna, as we have said, toward the beginning of the year.

To be sure, Prince Eugene's mistress had materially assisted him in all his diplomatic intrigues; like Ariadne, she had given him the ball of thread to help him out of the labyrinth of Schoenbrunn.

However little versed one may be in the *chronique galante* of the day, one can understand that as soon as his return became known, all Paris hastened to call upon him; whence the duke perceived that, even though he had been forgotten for two years, the poorest memories need only to be refreshed.

He alighted at his hotel, as we said at the beginning of this chapter, enjoining his people to allow no one to intrude upon him; and the order was observed with military strictness. It is well known that Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu was as well served as any nobleman in the realm.

Disappointment was visibly painted upon the faces of the inquisitive or affectionate friends who had hastened

to come and knock at the great doors or the secret doors, on the street or on the passage-way in the rear.

For that evening the trusty servant of Monsieur de Richelieu stood on guard behind one of these secret doors, his ear on the alert, and his eye applied to a hole in the wall, near the hinge, taking careful note of all the sounds in the passage-way.

At last, after almost an hour of waiting, a hired carriage stopped not far from the garden-wall. A woman, whose shape and face were carefully concealed, alighted from it; whom by her quick gait, and her curious manner of dismissing the coachman, the servant recognized as the person whom he was told to look out for.

The snow was falling, and it was quite dark. No one was abroad in the neighborhood.

The servant opened the door he was guarding, before any knock was heard; and the young woman glided through the opening, and directed her steps across the garden, like one accustomed to the place.

When she reached the house, she fairly fell into the arms of the duke, who was standing at a door on the ground floor, and who embraced her affectionately, crying,—

"Ah, my lovely princess, you have come at last! I have been waiting so impatiently for you, and had abandoned all hope of seeing you again."

Princess in very truth; for this young woman who laughingly returned the duke's embrace, and placed her little hands in his with the utmost friendliness, was called Mademoiselle de Charolais, and was not only a princess, but a princess of the blood.

She made no other reply to the duke's apostrophe than a lover-like kiss. He led her then into a large room, luxuriously furnished, heated to the temperature of a

beautiful spring day, the walls of which were hung with tapestry, whereon amorous shepherds and shepherdesses disported themselves amid flowers and verdure.

A table laid near the fireplace, two comfortable easy-chairs, a sideboard laden with porcelain, which was an extravagance seldom indulged in at this time, when the Pompadour cult had not risen above the norizon, and the soft radiance of the candles, inspired a feeling of general well-being, which made the manifest pleasure of the princess even more expansive.

"Now, Duke," said she, "before we sit down to supper, let me have a look at you."

She took her stand squarely in front of him.

"Look at me, Princess! what for, pray?"

"Why, so that I can be sure it's really you."

"Ah, Princess, your memory is not so good as mine, it seems."

"How so?"

"Because I recognized you at once."

"You don't think I have grown too plain?"

"You are still the loveliest of all princesses, born or to be born."

"But why don't you ask me how I think you are looking?"

"Oh! it's useless."

"Pshaw! why?"

"I don't count now; I am an Austrian, a savage, I have become accustomed to being looked at by the Germans. So give me time, Princess, to lay aside the air I have acquired; it will be a matter of a week or so, and when I have become a Frenchman, yes, a Parisian, again, I will come and stand between you and your mirror."

"So you think you have changed, do you?"

"Tremendously."

"You have become ambitious."

"'T is true, Princess."

"I was told so, but I would not believe it."

"Nevertheless it is the exact truth."

"Well, let us sup, shall we? You have already told me how love attacks young girls; and while we are at supper, you shall tell me how ambition attacks men."

"Believe me, I shall always be happy to teach you anything; but meanwhile, dear Princess, as you suggest, let us sup."

The princess took her place at the table.

"Do you know," said she, "that I have acquired an enormous appetite in two years?"

"For what, Princess?"

"Alas!"

"Oh, what a pitiful sigh!"

"To what do you attribute it?"

"To what does one usually attribute the female sigh?"

"To love, you mean?"

"*Dame!*"

"Well, you are in error, my dear Duke. I am not the least bit in love with anybody."

"You say that like one who would like to be still in love, or soon to become so."

"No, upon my honor!"

"Indeed?"

"You may believe me or not, as you choose; but in your absence —"

"Well?"

"I said 'adieu' to love."

The duke laughed aloud.

"You flatter me," she continued; "but you can't make that which has ceased to exist exist, or bring the dead to life."

"Ah, Princess, then you don't believe in ghosts?"

"What's the use of believing in them when they are only unsubstantial shadows?"

"Princess, there are ghosts which come from a greater distance than the other world, — from Austria, for example, — and which, I swear to you, are honest flesh and blood; and if you doubt it, Princess — "

"No, Duke, I never doubt a thing when you say it's so."

"Well, then — "

"Well, then, it does n't change my decision. I shall never love again, Armand."

"And who is the wretch, the man abandoned by heaven and earth, who has inspired such a feeling as that in you?"

"The man? Why, have there been any men in France, Duke, since you went away?"

"Thanks, Princess."

"No, upon my word! I speak as I think."

"At least you will tell me the source of this aversion for the pain or the pleasure; for, as you know, true lovers are like true gamblers, and rank the pain of losing next to the pleasure of winning."

"Duke, there is neither pain nor pleasure at the bottom of my determination."

"But think of me. I return because I am bored to death there in Vienna; I perform prodigies of diplomacy in order to earn the right to return to France, and you come and tell me such things as that you are bored at Versailles!"

"Look! I have grown fat."

She held out a lovely arm to the duke, who pressed his lips upon it in a long kiss.

It was so long that Monsieur de Richelieu did not

just know how to end it, and Mademoiselle was interested to see how he would end it.

"How about the king?" he said at last, restoring her captive arm to the princess.

She looked at him, and almost blushed.

"What! the king? What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing; I simply meant to ask you about his health."

"It 's very good," said Mademoiselle de Charolais, pronouncing the words in a curious tone.

"That 'very good' does not satisfy me."

"How must I say it, Duke?"

"I would like you to say it either more gayly or in more sober fashion; in the former case it would signify a happy woman, in the latter a jealous one."

"Jealous! I? Jealous of whom?"

"Why, jealous of the king, of course."

"Jealous of the king! What induces you to say such absurd things, Duke?"

"Oh, well! when the time does come, — and I sincerely hope that he will give you reason to be one or the other —"

"I made happy or jealous by the king? I?"

"Princess, upon my word, one would say that I was speaking Dutch."

"The fact is that I no longer comprehend you, my dear Duke; have you heard nothing from France for two years, pray? I imagined that ambassadors carried on a regular correspondence, two indeed, — a public and a secret correspondence, one dealing with politics and one with the affections."

"Princess, I have not carried on two systems of correspondence."

"No, you have had a hundred, I suppose."

"It's a fact that everybody, except you, has written to me."

"Then they have told you that the king —"

"That the king is handsome, yes."

"And that he is virtuous also?"

"They have told me that; but as I know that Monsieur de Fréjus had all my letters opened, I did not believe a word of it."

"You were wrong."

"Why so?"

"It is as true as the truth, Duke."

"What! that the king is virtuous?"

"Yes."

"The king has no mistress?"

"No."

"It's incomprehensible. Aha, Princess, I see, I understand."

The duke roared with laughter.

"What is it that you understand?" said Mademoiselle de Charolais.

"*Pardieu!* You don't want to denounce yourself, and you wait for me to arrive with the proofs."

"Nonsense!"

"Take care!"

"My dear Duke, the king has not so much as looked at me for two years."

"Suppose you make oath to that."

"By our former affection, Duke!"

"Oh, I believe you, — for you loved me almost as much as I loved you, Princess."

"Those were happy days!"

"Alas! as you were just saying, we were young then."

"Come, come! we are relapsing into the dismals, Duke, and you seem to have an especially depressing effect upon me."

"How so?"

"You make me out an old woman."

"My mind was running on one subject, Princess."

"What is that?"

"If the king has no favorite, the court must be in terrible confusion."

"My friend, it is simply chaotic."

"It must be; for in that case Fleury governs France, and France is a seminary."

"There are seminaries, Duke, which are places of wild dissipation compared to the France of to-day."

"Naturally, when the king is virtuous, everybody else wants to be the same."

"Duke, it is positively sickening."

"The result must be a sort of overflow of virtue from the court into the streets, so that the people will be submerged."

"Everybody has the disease now."

"And the queen?"

"In the queen virtue is carried to such a height that it has become absolute ferocity."

"*Mon Dieu!* I will wager in that case that she dabbles in politics, poor woman!"

"You have said it."

"With whom, in Heaven's name?"

"With whom do you suppose? Certainly not with the king."

"Why?"

"My dear man, she is so virtuous that she is afraid of her husband turning lover."

"Bah! is some one advising her?"

"Yes."

"She has taken a tutor in politics, then?"

"Yes; that is to say, she has kept the one she had."

"And it is still — "

"It is the one who made her Queen of France; and there is nothing like the gratitude of these Poles, especially of the women."

"They are not like the French women, are they, Princess?"

"Oh, no!"

"So she is conspiring with Monsieur le Duc de Bourbon?"

"Precisely."

"Who is still one-eyed?"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes."

"And who is humpbacked too?"

"The fact is that his backbone is doubling up. I don't know whether it is caused by the weight of affairs of state."

"Ah! that cunning De Prie never wrote me a word of all this."

"Oho! so the De Prie wrote you at Vienna, did she?"

"To be sure."

"Then I don't know why you care to question me, Duke."

"Why, to learn something."

"When the De Prie has dealt with a subject, is there anything more to be learned about it?"

"Well, now, my dear Princess, you may not believe me — "

"I warn you that I shall not believe you."

"I swear to you — "

"An oath! that makes it all the worse."

"I swear to you that there is nothing more between the marquise and me than between yourself and the king."

Mademoiselle de Charolais shrugged her shoulders with an incredulous smile.

"Because you are just from Vienna, do you fancy I am just from Lapland?" said she.

"Go on, my dear friend," said the duke, seeing that it was quite useless to argue with the incredulity of the princess.

"What shall I go on with?"

"What you began to tell me. You were saying that the queen is conspiring with Monsieur le Duc de Bourbon?"

"Yes."

"To overthrow Fleury?"

"To overthrow Fleury."

"And why does she desire to overthrow Fleury?"

"Because Fleury is an old curmudgeon, and has kept her short of money. Speaking of money, do you, who are the friend of the De Prie, tell her, pray, that she has shown execrable taste in her protegée."

"What protégée?"

"Why, the Polish woman!"

"Oh, Princess, that poor queen, pity her; she is more to be pitied than blamed."

"But I do pity her more than you do yourself; I pity her particularly for having been made Queen of France by that scheming marquise."

"Upon my word, Princess, you amaze me when you say that you have been bored these last two years. When one hates as you do, there is always more or less amusement. Come, keep on the right side of the marquise, if it were only for Monsieur le Duc's sake."

"No, no, no, I loathe the very sight of the wretch; she made the queen queen."

"It was her right, since she was intrusted with the mission."

"Very good! but was it also her right to carry a trousseau to the poor princess, — to count her stockings,

skirts, and petticoats, as if she were the laundress of a provincial bride?"

"Listen, Princess, the marquise was Leblanc's daughter-in-law."

"Well, I am reconciled to you again, and I return to Monsieur de Fréjus."

"To our curmudgeon, that is."

"Knowing that the queen had no money, he sent Orry, the Comptroller-General, to her, endowed with full powers to negotiate a loan in the name of poor Marie Leczinska; and he represented to Monsieur de Fréjus that the poor princess was not in a condition befitting her lofty rank. Fleury admitted the justice of his remark, mingled his pity with that of the Comptroller-General, and took from his cash-box — for he has a cash-box, like Harpagon —"

"Took what?"

"Guess."

"*Dame!* you say like Harpagon."

"Duke, cover your face; he took out a hundred louis! We are governed by a man who gives a hundred louis to a queen! You were that creature's ambassador at Vienna!"

"If I had known this feature of his character, I swear to you, Princess, that I would not have remained there twenty-four hours. What must he have said when he heard that at my formal entry I had the horses of my suite shod with silver, and my own with gold?"

"Yes, and that you had so managed it that they were all without shoes when you arrived at your hotel."

"Let us return to Monsieur de Fréjus. You have no conception of my interest in what you tell me."

"[illegible] he took a hundred louis from his cash-box for [illegible]. Orry turned as red as a peony, and argued

with the minister that her Majesty was in need of money.

"Fleury sighed.

"'If she really needs money,' said he, 'why, we must bleed ourselves;' and he added fifty louis to the hundred."

"Oh, that is n't possible!" cried Richelieu; "you 're romancing, Princess."

"Say that it seems incredible, and I am with you. But wait till I am done, I beg."

"There is more to come, then?"

"Orry's color changed from bright red to white; seeing which Monsieur de Fréjus suspected that he was going to complain again.

"'Oh, well,' said he, 'I will add another twenty-five louis, but she must not ask for any more for a month.'

"With that Harpagon closed his cash-box."

"One hundred and seventy-five louis!"

"Twenty-five less than I used to give your servant, Duke, when he brought me a note from you on New Year's Day."

Richelieu bent his head politely.

"Princess," said he, "I must confess that while I have been away most unearthly things have happened. So the queen is in a rage with Monsieur de Fréjus?"

"A furious rage."

"Well, well! won't she turn the king against him?"

"Just fancy, Duke; on the other hand it is Monsieur de Fréjus who is trying to turn the king against her!"

"What, the virtuous bishop!"

"I tell you that it is an abomination!"

"And the desolation will follow, Princess; don't dream of doubting it. So there is criticism below and aloft?"

"Everywhere."

"Are there Fréjusians and Bourbonians?"

"In battle array! The guns are loaded and the matches alight."

"Then this is the contention,—to get the king in subjection by some means or other?"

"Exactly."

"And Monsieur de Bourbon and Monsieur de Fréjus are both seeking this means?"

"You have hit the mark."

"Monsieur le Duc by trying to maintain the queen's influence?"

"He will not succeed."

"You think so?"

The princess put her mouth close to Richelieu's ear.

"The king has been complaining for a week," said she, "that the queen has kept herself secluded."

"Oh, the poor king!" said the duke, bursting into laughter; "does Monsieur de Fréjus know it?"

"Of course he does."

"And he, more clever than Monsieur de Bourbon, is thinking, no doubt, of placing some new star in the sky?"

"What did you mean, pray, by saying that you knew nothing of what was going on? *Tudieu!* what a diplomatist you are!"

"Surely, dear Princess, I shall never go astray about Monsieur de Bourbon, so long as I have the same opinion of him that I have always had."

"What has been your opinion?"

"That he was an idiot."

"Why?"

"Because the queen is alive."

"Oh! but the king is very virtuous, Duke."

"There you go again, Princess. Oh, don't make me so suspicious."

"Of whom and of what?"

"Of you and of beauty."

"Where do I come in, Duke?"

"Princess, Monsieur de Bourbon is on the watch, Monsieur de Fréjus is on the watch; while I, just returned from Vienna, have found without watching at all."

"Found what?"

"The means."

"It is —"

"It is you! The king must fall in love with you, my dear Royal Highness, and he must be guided by your superior wisdom."

"Oh, Duke!"

"Well, then, what have you to say? Something prudish?"

"Pshaw!"

"Come, does n't the bait of governing the kingdom offer some allurement? Do you object to making the fortune of your old friends?"

"It is n't that; but —"

"Is n't it true that among all the women by whom his Majesty is surrounded, you are the one most capable of inspiring in him the desire to be ruled with a loving hand? In short, Princess, make the attempt. What makes you hesitate?"

"Frankly now, are n't you joking?"

"I? Oh, the idea!"

"Did no one write you anything at Vienna?

"About what?"

"Have you heard nothing since your return?"

"About whom?"

"About me."

"No," said the duke, with the most innocent expression.

"Well, Duke, the same idea occurred to me as to you."

"Really? And why did you renounce it?"

"I did not; quite the contrary."

"What! Did you put it in execution?"

"So far as it depended upon me, yes, Duke."

"And —"

"And I was repulsed."

"You, repulsed! Impossible!"

"It is, as I have the honor to inform you, however, my dear Duke; and I tell you this, because I prefer you should hear it from me rather than from somebody else. After all, perhaps my failure was due to one thing in particular."

"Don't ask me to divine what it was, Princess; I give it up at once."

"I am going to tell you."

"Say on."

"I was in love with the king."

"You, Princess!" cried Richelieu. "Oh, what a mistake!"

"*Mon Dieu!* yes, I was, Duke, and that took away all my power."

"I understand; you seated yourself in a corner, and sighed, waiting for him to look at you, and — he did n't look at you."

"No, I did n't do just that, Duke. I scribbled off a verse or two, passable enough. I wrote them out in my best hand, which the king knows almost as well as you do, and I slipped them into the king's pocket."

"A declaration?"

"Something like it, upon my word! It ought to be worth something to be a princess of the blood."

"True, she may select her own partner for the dance.

Oh, what a pity that your memory is not good, Princess!"

"Why?"

"You could recite your verses to me; and we would decide whether they were as good as mine, or Rafté's rather."

"Impertinent!"

"Who wrote yours, Princess?"

"Myself."

"Then you ought to remember them."

"I rather think that I do remember them; if they had done any good, I would have forgotten them."

"I am listening, Princess."

"Here goes:—

Vous avez l'humeur sauvage,
Et le regard séduisant." [1]

"Ha, ha!" laughed the duke. "Arouet himself does no better."

Let me go on, then."

"I should be very sorry to stop you on such a fine road."

The princess continued:—

"Se pourrait-il qu'à votre âge
Vous fussiez indifférent?" [2]

"And he was indifferent to such poesy?"

"Just wait till the end, Duke! the point is at the end, as they say."

"Let 's see the point."

"Si l'amour veut vous instraire —"

"Oho! that's very tempting!"

[1] You have a savage disposition and a fascinating expression.
[2] Is it possible that one so young as you can be indifferent?

"But he did n't allow himself to be tempted.

Cédez, ne disputez rien,
On a fondé votre empire
Bien longtemps après le sien."[1]

"Oh, my Princess, that was altogether admirable, superb. And did not the king, when he found such verses in his pocket and recognized your handwriting, fall at your feet?"

"He was too young."

"Let it go at that, then, Princess. And now?"

"Oh, now it's another matter altogether. I would not write such verses now."

"Why not?"

"Because I am no longer in love, and because I would not for anything in the world make a downright declaration to a man whom I care nothing for. That is why I have no chance of success with the king, who absolutely requires to feel real affection himself, and to be able to inspire a similar sentiment."

"Come, come, come, that's a woman all over, dear Princess, to talk like that."

"No, it's perfectly true."

"Well, that's what I mean."

"It strikes you as it does me, then?"

"I am convinced."

"You renounce your project, Duke?"

"No, but I will seek a more efficacious instrument."

"What do you propose to do with your humble servant?"

"You? Oh, I beg you to consider yourself still my friend."

[1] If love desires to give you lessons, yield to him, do not resist. Your empire was not founded till long after his.

"A truce to pleasantry, Duke; I really mean that I am done with love."

"What! nothing but friendship at your age?"

"Duc, you still have a week of Austrian manners to get rid of; you said so yourself. Go about it, pray! I am a Parisienne, I tell you."

"Good!"

"We are friends?"

"Good, good!"

The princess rose, and toasted her little feet before the fire; the duke then ordered a carriage to be ready at the end of the street, and himself escorted Mademoiselle de Charolais to the carriage,— both, like Paul and Virginia, wrapped in the same cloak.

"Duke," said the princess, "a week from now you will know all the news, and I shall be little better than a savage compared with you. If you hear anything which will interest me, come and tell me; you know the way."

"Is it open?"

"Too open, alas!"

With these words they parted. The princess entered the carriage. Richelieu waited until it was out of sight, and returned to the house, much embarrassed by what he had learned this first night at Paris.

His servant handed him a list of twenty-seven women whom he had turned away on account of that useless princess.

"Bah!" said he, as he buried himself luxuriously in his well-warmed bed, "this is the politician's night: to-morrow I shall have the ideas of a cardinal."

As the clocks struck twelve, he went to sleep.

LI.

MADAME DE PRIE.

RICHELIEU had fallen asleep thinking of all the fair dames who had been denied admittance, and wondering which of them would do most, as the king's favorite, to help him to acquire the political influence which was a necessity to him now that he had become ambitious.

If reflections of this sort are not enough to deprive a diplomat of thirty-four of his sleep, they may at least give him agreeable dreams.

Thus, toward one in the morning, — about an hour, that is, after he had gone to bed, — and just as the multitude of pleasant thoughts he had been revolving in his brain were beginning to lose their distinctive colors and become mingled together in the mezzotints of sleep, he fancied that he was really asleep and dreaming.

In his dream he heard something that seemed like a persistent voice in front of the garden window of the room on the first floor where he was lying.

A man's voice denying, and a woman's voice insisting; in short, the voices of a man and woman quarrelling.

It also seemed to the Duc de Richelieu as if the tones of the female organ were not strange to hear, and its every vibration evoked delightful memories.

So he yielded to the charm of this alluring dream, and desired to follow it to the end. Has it never happened to you, dear Madame, to form the desire, even during your sleep, to make those delightful dreams which you sometimes dream last as long as possible?

The will is such a beautiful and powerful faculty. It comes to us so directly from God, the all-beautiful and all-powerful, that, even when we are asleep, it sometimes produces similar effects.

So the duke left only one ear awake, and with that ear he listened.

"No, Madame," said the male voice, "you can go no farther; it is quite enough for you to have forced, how I 'm sure I don't know, the door of the old courtyard. In truth, Madame, things are not done in that way now."

"Villain!" thought the duke, still convinced that he was asleep.

"Whether I did or did not force the door of the old court," retorted the penetrating female voice, "I am in the house, am I not?"

"You undoubtedly are, but by a trick."

"I am here at all events, no matter how I got here; half of the task is done. Now let me see the duke."

"Impossible, Madame. Monsieur le Duc retired an hour ago, very tired from his journey, and he is asleep."

"Look! here 's something to make a noise with; wake him."

The duke heard the musical sound of an indefinite number of gold pieces shaken together in a purse.

"Oho!" muttered the duke, still dreaming, "she is giving money to my servant. A pretty piece of business! the rogue's place is a good one."

"But, Madame," replied the obstinate lackey, who was determined to sustain his master's reputation as a favorite with the weaker sex, "Monsieur is not alone."

The duke sighed, stretched out his legs and arms as if to assure himself of his solitude, and murmured the word, "Scoundrel!"

"Well, what difference does that make?" continued the female voice. "I am not here to interfere with his love affairs; I have business to discuss with him. Come, boy, open, open!"

"But Monsieur le Duc forbade me —"

"Because he did not know that I was coming."

"Madame, I swear to you that he will wake up and overhear us, and that he will order me to show you the door,— which would be very discourteous on his part, while my entreaty to you not to insist is only in pursuance of my orders."

"That infernal lackey talks very well," said the duke from beneath his eider-down coverlet. "Now let's see what reply the lady will make. Ah!"

"On the other hand," she replied, "I am willing to wager that Monsieur le Duc will not dismiss me, especially if I give my name."

"Madame, take the thing on yourself, and knock on the window."

"No, no," replied the voice; "I don't want to take my hand out of my muff; it's freezing cold."

"*Diantre!*" thought Richelieu; "she must be a great lady, to be so afraid of the cold. Why doesn't she give her name at once? And upon my word, if she is pretty, I will agree with her about the weather."

"Come, boy, knock," continued the unknown female; "knock, and I will say that I did it."

"Madame, I will do it, since you force me to; but I would like to know your name."

"So would I," said Richelieu.

"Why so? If I tell it to your master, isn't that enough?"

"No, Madame; for if my master discharges me for this, you will owe me some compensation."

"That is no more than right, and you are a sharp boy. Compensation! See, here is something on account of what I shall owe you."

"More bribery!" muttered the duke; "this creature is determined to see me. Such things only happen in dreams."

"Now," said the servant, "I only need one thing more."

"What is that?"

"To know your name."

"Ah, Monsieur Rafté, you will end by irritating me."

"You see, Madame! since you know my name, I am entitled to know yours."

"Well, then, the Marquise de Prie —"

And at the same moment a vigorous blow was struck upon the duke's shutters.

"Madame de Prie!" cried Richelieu, pulling his head out from under the bed-clothes. "What! Did I dream that? Did I dream that Madame de Prie, Monsieur de Bourbon's mistress, was in my garden, wrangling with Rafté about five degrees of frost? A charming dream!"

At that moment another blow, followed by several more, quick and impatient, shook the long window.

"Why no, I was not dreaming after all; they are really knocking!" cried the duke.

"Duke! Duke! open!" cried the female voice, hoarse with the cold, aided by some little irritation.

"Open!" cried the duke, jumping out of bed and into his stockings and a dressing-gown which was at hand.

The servant entered the room.

"Where 's the marquise?" said the duke, eagerly.

"Here I am, Duke," said Madame de Prie, appearing on the threshold. "Are you out of bed?"

"Yes, Madame, at your service. Lights, Rafté, lights!"

"What! dressed already!" said Madame de Prie.

"Ay, ay!" said the duke.

"You heard me, then?"

"Yes, and recognized your voice."

"After all, Duke, you 're not such a fop as they say."

"Why?"

"Because a fop would not have got up."

"You forget, Marquise, that I have been away two years. But be seated, pray! Fire, Rafté, fire; don't you see that the marquise is shivering, my friend?"

"It would appear that after midnight the house is so full that you are obliged to use the garden for a ladies' reception-room," said the marquise, jokingly.

"On the contrary, Marquise, I was expecting you."

"Yes, sound asleep."

"Is it not thus that one awaits good fortune?"

"Oh, delightful, Duke!"

The marquise took the easy-chair which Richelieu offered her. Richelieu assumed one of his most graceful attitudes, and both began to laugh. The fire blazed up, and Rafté went out.

"Ah, Marquise," said the duke, "do you know that one o'clock has struck?"

"Yes, and it 's cold enough to split the rocks."

"Was Monsieur de Bourbon's fire out, that you come here?"

"Upon my word, Duke, it was absolutely necessary that I should speak to you first."

"Pardon me, but how did you succeed in getting in? Just now, when I was half-awake and half-dreaming, I thought I heard either you or Rafté speak of a door that you had forced."

"Forced, no; opened, yes."

"How was that, Marquise?"

"Why, with a key of course!"

"What! you have a key to my house, and I go tranquilly to sleep exposed to such danger?"

"Why, Duke, you gave me one in the old days, if I remember aright."

"Yes, so I did; but I thought that you had returned it."

"What a cruel memory he has!"

"I should think so, — a statesman! However, whence got you that key? You understand, Marquise, that I ask you the question for my own satisfaction."

"Yes, there might be a factory devoted to making them. Indeed, that would not be a bad speculation."

"Marquise, you terrify me."

"Don't be alarmed; this key —"

"Well?"

"Came to me from a less honest source. It is not a false key, but a real one."

"But where did you get it?"

"Two years ago, before you left for Vienna, you gave several of them around in Paris."

"Yes; but how do you think that I could conceive of a woman of our days keeping an absentee's key two whole years, — unless indeed she had put it in her Mass-book and forgotten it?"

"Ah! there 's where you are in error, Duke; we have become very devout, you see. Piety is fashionable. Oh, there have been vast changes in Paris since you went away; you left Monsieur le Regent at the Palais-Royal, and you return to find Monsieur de Fréjus at Versailles."

"All this does n't answer my question as to where you fished up that key; and unless you stole it from some one —"

"Stole it! For shame! You treat me like a princess of the blood, my dear Duke; you take me for Mademoiselle de Valois or Mademoiselle de Charolais. Stole it! For shame! I bought it."

"Bought it! Oho! Who sold it to you?"

"A lady's-maid who did n't know what she was selling. You understand: one sees a key on the floor, takes possession of it, and no one knows anything about it; by and by along comes some one who gives twenty-five louis for it. If the mistress asks for it, one looks astonished and says, 'What key, Madame?' It's tempting for a soubrette."

"And then, too, as you say, Marquise, the key of a man who is at Vienna. Aha! people must have thought seriously that I should never return from Vienna."

"Yes; everybody except me, who, in my capacity of Minister of Foreign Affairs, knew that you were on the way home."

"Of course."

"Therefore I acquired possession of the famous key, thinking that you would not have your locks changed until the day after your return. That was a clever calculation, was it not?"

"Very accurate, as you see."

"So that the key will be worth to me, I hope, a little more than it cost me. But it is strange, Duke — "

The marquise drew in three or four long breaths through her nose.

"What is it?" asked Richelieu.

The marquise continued the process noted above.

"I can smell a woman here," she exclaimed.

"Nonsense! I am alone."

"I tell you that there is a woman here whose perfumery I am acquainted with."

"Marquise — I swear — "

"It 's a princess's perfumery."

"Ah! you flatter me, Marquise."

"Coxcomb! he is the same as ever."

"So are you, Marquise; only you improve every day."

"Yes; at least, that is what my flatterers will tell me so long as I am in favor."

"And you are now at the very top notch of favor, Marquise."

"I think so, and I have come to prove it to you."

"Ah, let us have the proof! "

"But first of all, Duke, be frank with me. Have you any one here? "

"No one."

"Upon your honor? "

"Faith of Richelieu! You hesitate? "

"Duke, if it were of love affairs that I have to speak to you, I would take your word in a moment; but as we are going to talk politics, and in politics the least indiscretion may be fatal, permit me to do as Saint Thomas did."

"*Vide pedes, vide manus* (Behold my feet and my hands!) "

"You say that to make me think that you are a Latin scholar."

"God forbid that I should make any such claim! "

"Well, then, prove what you say."

"Marquise, I will take the candlestick, and we will explore every nook and corner of my apartments; will that satisfy you? "

"If you please, Duke."

"Shall we begin with the fireplace? But there 's a fire there; you hardly suspect that anything is hidden there, I fancy? "

"Unless it should happen to be a princess of the blood; those ladies are as incombustible as salamanders."

"Why might one not say as much of the princes of the blood, Marquise?" said Richelieu.

The marquise smiled at the hit.

"Let us examine first the space between the bed and the wall," said she.

"It 's empty," said Richelieu; "go and look."

"The trunk-closets."

"Empty, empty, empty. Do you wish to look under the coats?"

"Useless; if any one were there, we should see the legs."

"There 's the secret stairway."

"Useless. The bolts are thrown, and the hall is not heated; while we have been talking a lady of quality would have frozen to death, and consequently would have ceased to be dangerous to me."

"Well reasoned!"

"As we are alone, let us talk."

"Let us talk," echoed the duke, leading the marquise back to her chair.

LII.

THE POLITICS OF MADAME LA MARQUISE DE PRIE.

THE marquise resumed her seat, and the duke leaned upon the back of her chair.

"Marquise, my dear Marquise," said he, taking her hand, "if you knew how much I regret that your bad temper compelled me formerly to ask you for the key."

"Why?"

"Because if you had cared for me, to-day, after two years of separation, we should be mad with love for one another."

"Duke, I came to talk business. Come, let my hand go; time flies."

"As you please, Marquise."

And the duke retained her hand.

"I was telling you —"

"That you are more in favor than ever."

"Does that surprise you?"

"Well, yes, it does."

"How so?"

"On account of the bitter warfare which old Fleury seems to be waging against Monsieur le Duc."

"We are giving him as good as he sends, thank God!"

"He has the king on his side, Marquise, and you know that when they deprive the king of his old preceptor, he weeps and shrieks."

"Yes; but we have on our side the queen, and when they deprive the king of the queen —"

"Look out, Marquise. They say that the queen is turning very virtuous,— too virtuous, in fact,— and that the king is beginning to fear her more and to love her less."

"Ah, they have told you that?"

"They have told me more than that."

"What then?"

"They have told me that Louis XV. has begun to live apart from her, — an entirely new thing."

"It is true."

"Very well! So it seems to me, Marquise, that you are leaning upon a broken reed in the person of the queen, — a queen who, as the king says, keeps herself secluded."

They both laughed at this; but in the midst of her hilarity the marquise, looking at the duke with the expression of one who proposes to deal a decisive blow, said to him, —

"My dear Duke, do you know why the king is living apart from her?"

"*Dame!* because he prefers to."

"Do you know why the queen keeps herself secluded?"

"Because it suits her to do so, I suppose."

"Well, no, not exactly; it's because she is *enceinte*, Duke."

Richelieu started at this intelligence, and uttered an exclamation which showed the marquise how deeply interested he was in it.

"Ah, very good!" said he, after a pause.

"You can understand, Duke," continued Madame de Prie, "that with a dauphin in the world, our fortune is secure; let the queen once be a mother, and she will assume the demeanor befitting her rank. Already her character is very serious; she has admirable ideas, and

she is ambitious, — I should say, rather, thoroughly saturated with ambition."

"By whom, Marquise."

"Oh, play the know-nothing, do! Look here! is Vienna so far from the Duchies of Bar and Lorraine that you do not know how eager Stanislas is to have a hand in managing our affairs?"

"I understand you, Marquise, and I think it may well be that you are right."

"You do think so, don't you? And I at once thought of you as one whom we must have among our friends."

"I trust I am already in that category, Marquise."

"Oh, of course! but I am speaking of friends of another variety, — political friends."

"May I be one of them?"

"Oh, it depends entirely upon yourself."

"Tell me something of your plan."

"It is this: evidently Monsieur de Fréjus means to monopolize everything."

"Even to the cardinal's hat; yes, it 's very plain."

"And to disgrace Monsieur le Duc?"

"And to disgrace Monsieur le Duc."

"To effect that he must have two sources of influence: first, the king himself, — he has him; secondly, some one who governs the king. Would it not seem to you the proper thing, morally speaking, that this domination over the king should be wielded by the queen, — by the wife over the husband?"

"It would indeed be a most exemplary moral spectacle, Marquise."

"We must hold fast to morality in every possible way."

"I suggest that you make use of immoral means, Marquise."

"Why, my dear Duke, the king is as virtuous as a girl."

"Agreed, Marquise. But girls have been known to cease to be virtuous. Indeed we see instances of it every day; nothing is more common."

"The queen will keep him in the straight path; we must combine to support her."

"Nothing easier. All we have to do is —"

"To surround the king with good examples, instead of parading all sorts of sin before him. You would never imagine the inventions of that abominable old priest to fill the poor little prince's mind with such ideas as best suited his schemes. I declare that it is sickening to me."

"*Dame!* in his place would I have done the same? No, no! I would have sent the king another preceptor, and I would have selected you to make his lessons delightful to him."

"Now, you 're joking again instead of talking seriously. And yet, my dear Duke, it 's worth while under the circumstances."

"Yes, Marquise, yes; I see your plan. You wish to make the court of the present king while he is in the bloom of youth what the old king's court became when he was in his dotage: thus Louis XV. will be Louis XIV., the queen, Madame de Maintenon; Monsieur le Duc will play the rôle of Le Tellier, and you will be Père La Chaise, — is n't that it?"

"Almost, omitting the ennui and the old age."

"Well, well, Marquise, you must be relying upon a twofold conversion on my part, to make such propositions as this to me."

"I rely upon you because you have really changed. I rely upon you because you have been too frivolous not

to become serious, because you have compromised your reputation too often not to be discreet at last."

"Marquise, dictate to me what I must do."

"I will do so, and will also give you a glimpse of your prospective emoluments."

"I am listening and looking."

"You must appear at the queen's card-party to-morrow. What do I say? To-morrow means to-day, as it is half-past two in the morning."

"Very well; it was my purpose, Marquise."

"You will make a sensation."

"To tell you the truth, I rather expect I shall."

"I don't know whether the queen cares much for you?"

"I can relieve your uncertainty on that point. I know that she does n't care for me at all."

"You must try to bring her to a better opinion of you; everything is easy for you, if you only choose."

"I will try. She is a Pole, and I will be a German, which is about the same thing."

"Good! Once on good terms with the queen, you will praise her perfection to the king; by so doing you will soon make friends with the king, Duke."

"Yes, if I amuse him."

"Oh, you 'll amuse him."

"To do so morally, you see, is difficult."

"He is passionately fond of hunting, in the first place."

"Very good; but he does n't hunt all the time, especially at night."

"He is fond of gardening."

"Yes, I know that Monsieur de Fleury taught him to dote on plants and lettuce, and that he likes to watch them grow and wither. As for myself, I could never

bring myself to the point of digging in the ground and killing the caterpillars on lettuce. It would need a fourth sojourn in the Bastille to induce me to raise violets, notwithstanding the example of the great Condé."

"You can tell him stories."

"I don't know any now."

"Invent some, then."

"You see, Marquise, there are only three things on earth which never fail to divert crowned heads."

"What are they?"

"Look at Louis XIV.; there was a king who in his youth was never bored, but was so well entertained all the time that when he grew old, nothing under heaven would amuse him. Well, Louis XIV. loved these three things, — women, war, and extravagance."

"Oh, Duke! Duke!"

"You will tell me that the queen is too jealous to allow him to speak to a woman, too tender-hearted to allow him to go to war, and too economical to allow him to spend money as he chooses."

"Do you think so?"

"To be sure I do. Doesn't this worthy princess ordinarily ask before buying anything, 'How much does this cost?'"

"She asks, 'How much *does* it cost?' because Fleury invariably asks, 'How much *did* it cost?'"

"Never mind; I have spoken none the less like an oracle."

"Your deduction from all this?"

"Is that it will be very difficult for me to guide the king, Marquise."

"Ah, *dame!* doubtless it will if you create difficulties as you go along; if you don't choose to deal with each one according to his or her character; if you refuse to

see that Louis XV. is naturally inclined to virtue, and that everything about him savors of the worthy bourgeois, who thinks of nothing but having a family to be a good father to; if, in short, you measure the king with your own yardstick. Ah, Duke! Duke! everybody does n't deserve a taste of the Bastille at seventeen."

"Good! now you 're insulting me."

"What! on the contrary, I am only too flattering; come, no more resistance, and above all no more paradoxes."

"I bend, Marquise."

"Then you consent to be on the queen's side?"

"I will tell the king that she is the most entertaining of women."

"And you agree to amuse the king?"

"Yes, if you do not limit me in the class of amusements."

"I limit you to conjugal love, that 's all."

"Oh, no, Marquise, that 's barred; that 's your business, not mine. A man can always play at virtue with women, — that 's good form; but with men it 's rank hypocrisy. Strike that off the list, Marquise, strike it off."

"Then you don't care to become minister of state, or to be sent to Flanders some fine morning to assume the baton of a marshal of France?"

"Bah! if it ever rains that sort of merchandise, Marquise, I promise you that I shall be one of the first to stand under the gutter."

"Well, what must be must, and I turn the king over to you; don't corrupt his morals, that 's all that I ask of you.

"I promise that, and now for something to bind the bargain, Marquise."

"Duke, you will undervalue the importance of the negotiation if it is paid for in advance."

"You are a perfect demon of wit and grace, Marquise."

"Oh, don't pretend to sigh, Duke! You know very well that you care nothing for me any more. I am a woman in politics, and you would find no charm in my affection now, for I am all for the main chance. I am of no use to any one except pages who want to become ensigns and make their fortunes with my consent. Let us return to our conclusions."

"Very well. First."

"First, you will come to the queen's card-party this evening."

"Yes, Marquise."

"Second, you will reinstate yourself in her good graces."

"It 's as good as done."

"Third, you will join forces with us against Monseigneur the Bishop."

"That is in accordance with my inclination."

"Fourth, you will worm your way into the king's favor."

"I have no need to promise to do what I can in that direction; it is my most earnest desire."

"Fifth, you will leave the king virtuous as he is, you will do nothing to corrupt him, you will put aside all suggestions of giving him a mistress."

"I promise neutrality, if the king exhibits no inclination that way."

"Never fear, I will answer for that."

"Very well, Marquise! and now?"

"What?"

"On your side, what undertakings do you enter into? There is no contract, you know, unless there are two contracting parties and mutual consideration."

"On our side, we bind ourselves —"

"First —"

"Oho! you want an undertaking in several articles, do you?"

"Why not?"

"So be it; first, to give you within the year whatever embassy you select, or a minister's portfolio."

"The latter also to be selected by myself?"

"Yes, provided you don't select Monsieur le Duc's."

"Of course, — honor to whom honor is due."

"Oh, it would not be the first time that you have laid your hand upon what belongs to him."

"You confess it yourself, Marquise."

"Second," said she, quickly.

"I am listening."

"Second; to appoint you lieutenant-general at the first opportunity, and marshal at the second."

"How much time do you ask to fulfil these engagements?"

"Let us say two years, if you please."

"It 's very short, take care!"

"Oh, no! Fleury will die with rage in less time than that, — with rage or age, as you choose."

"I prefer rage; it 's surer."

"With rage, then, so be it. Your hand, Duke!"

"Why, Madame, for an hour I have been holding them both out to you."

"Come, kiss me, — I have no rouge, — and adieu!"

She rang quickly.

Rafté appeared.

"Marquise, Marquise," said the duke, in an undertone; "this has an air of hostility."

"Now do you want me to tell you something?" said she, standing at the door.

"Say on."

"Well then, Duke, if you are as well-disposed toward us as I have been ill-disposed toward you for the last hour, Monsieur de Fleury will be under our feet within a month."

She pressed his hand with the tips of her saucy pink fingers, gave him a last glance overflowing with mischievous coquetry, and darted into the garden, dragging behind her Rafté, who could hardly keep up with her rapid step.

"The devil!" mused Richelieu, alone once more, "I am very curious now to know what proposals Monsieur de Fréjus has to make to me."

LIII.

A NOCTURNAL ADVENTURE.

MADAME DE PRIE had scarcely taken ten steps toward the carriage which was waiting in the distance, and which drove toward her as she left the garden, and Rafté, who was watching her to guard against accidents, was about to close the door, when three men came running along the passage at full speed, and threw themselves violently against the door, like three rabbits trying to get into the same burrow.

Rafté tried to hold the door against them, but their three strengths united were too much for his. He saw that he was going to be beaten, and beat a parley.

The tallest of the three men replied that there was no time to talk, the negotiation might be prolonged; and therefore he summoned the garrison to allow him and his companions to enter peaceably, or they would force their way in.

"But, Messieurs! but, Messieurs!" cried the servant.

"'But' as much as you choose! The patrol are after us, and we have no desire to go to the guard-house."

"So much the more reason to keep you out, Messieurs; if the patrol are after you, you must be law-breakers, Messieurs. I will call for help!"

"Devil take you, triple idiot!" said the same man who had already spoken; "for whom do you take us, in God's name?"

"Oh, thieves dress very well sometimes."

The patrol were on the way; they could be heard rapidly approaching.

"Come," cried the smallest and probably the youngest of the fugitives, for his voice seemed almost boyish, — "come, force your way in, Messieurs!"

This voice imparted so much courage to the other two that they speedily entered the garden over the body of Richelieu's man-servant.

The tallest of the three men at once attended to the secure fastening of the door; while Rafté, in a state of bewilderment, rose from the ground and ran off as fast as his feet would carry him toward the house, muttering as he ran, —

"Is it possible, *mon Dieu!* is it possible?"

He entered the duke's chamber just as that gentleman had got into bed again, and was trying to go to sleep.

Rafté entered the room, we said; we made a mistake, he hurled himself through the door.

"Well, well! what 's the matter now?" the duke demanded.

"Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur!"

"What has happened?"

"Such an adventure as never falls to the lot of any one but you, Monsieur."

"Has the queen come to call on me, by chance?"

"Better than that, Monsieur, better than that; at least I think so. Dress yourself quickly, Monsieur; dress yourself."

"Oh, pshaw! must I?"

"Yes, hurry up, Monsieur le Duc, hurry up!"

The duke leaped out of bed as he would have done in case of a night attack in a campaign.

"In full dress, Monsieur!" said Rafté; "in full dress, Monsieur."

"Explain yourself, will you, villain?"

"Monsieur, there are three of them."

"Suppose there are! Do you think you know them?"

"Masked, Monsieur, masked!"

"Oho! the balls at the Opera have begun, I believe: but where are these three?"

"In the courtyard, Monsieur, in the courtyard."

"They forced the door, then?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"And you allowed them to do it?"

"I resisted then, Monsieur; but they passed over my body."

"Did they, indeed! Give me a gun, then!"

"Oh, Monsieur, don't dream of such a thing!"

"Why not? Three men force my door and ill-treat my servant at two o'clock in the morning, and —"

"Monsieur, among these three men there is a certain voice —"

"A woman's voice?" asked Richelieu, eagerly.

"Monsieur, I can say no more, lest I seem an idiot in Monsieur's eyes, if I am mistaken."

"Very well, then, go and leave me in peace!"

"No, Monsieur, no; take the trouble to come where they are, and you shall see —"

"What?"

"What you shall see."

The duke slipped on his stockings and his dressing-gown again, took his sword in his left hand, and followed in Rafté's wake.

The three men were crouching behind the little door, and listening with much hilarity to the remarks which the watch were addressing to them from without the wall.

"Aha!" said the sergeant, "well, well, well! They are in the hotel of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu!"

"Well! in the hotel of Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu, yes. What then?" asked one of the runaways.

"Very good! very good!" replied the sergeant; "Monsieur le Duc has just returned home, and is beginning his pranks already."

"Hallo!" said Richelieu, drawing near, "it seems that somebody here is masquerading under my name."

The trio roared with laughter.

"Oh, yes," said the sergeant; "insult respectable females in the street, and laugh in the face of the king's officers! A duke and an ambassador! I shall make an official report of this business."

"The devil! the devil!" exclaimed the duke; "I have no part in this. What, Messieurs, have you been engaged in insulting respectable women on the street?"

"They screamed much too loud to be respectable," said one of the masks.

"You treat this matter very lightly, Monsieur Mask," said Richelieu approaching, that one of the three who had spoken; "it 's easy to see that your name is not Richelieu, as mine is, and that you have no need of making a reputation for morality."

"The duke! it 's the duke!" exclaimed the three men in a low voice.

"Messieurs," Richelieu continued, "I desire to think you gentlemen; such am I, and with gentlemen I know where I stand. However, I wish to know, and you will understand me, — I wish to know whether you are or are not gentlemen, so that I may know what to do with the bad impression you have made on me. Unmask, therefore, I beg."

At these words there was a very pronounced exhibition of uncertainty among the masked men.

"Messieurs," said the duke, "I hope that you will not

force me to open my gate to the archers of the watch with my own hand."

Thereupon the tallest of the three left the group, and walked directly to the duke.

"Do you recognize me?" he asked, raising his mask.

"Pecquigny!" cried Richelieu.

"Himself."

"What the deuce are you in a row with the watch for?"

"It's like this. We went to the ball at the Opera after the play; after the ball we had supper; after supper, being a little heated, we started to take a walk around the city."

"Yes, I see, and you insulted some decent women."

"Oh, no; that's the merest nonsense, my dear fellow."

"Allow me to ask you a question, my dear Pecquigny."

"What is it?"

"You have unmasked."

"*Dame!* yes, as you see."

"Wait a moment! — you have unmasked — and I don't know a better gentleman in France than you. But why, when you have unmasked, do your companions still wear their masks?"

"They have good reasons."

"But what are the reasons? It seems to me that I might be allowed to know them."

"Do not insist, Duke."

"Are they women? But no, it's impossible; they are too tall."

"Duke — "

"Perhaps they are princes of the blood?"

"I swear — "

"My dear fellow, if they are not women or princes of the blood, I can imagine no reason which can prevent their unmasking as you have done."

Pecquigny was still hesitating. Meanwhile the archers, in a furious rage at receiving no other reply than shouts of laughter to their summons to surrender, began to hammer at the little door with the stocks of their muskets.

The duke, beginning to lose his temper, took Pecquigny by the sleeve.

"Look you, Pecquigny," said he, "I have come back from Vienna very virtuous, very peaceable, and very philosophical, but for all that as irascible as a turkey-cock when I am cheated out of my sleep. Now you pull me out of bed, you mystify me, and compromise me with the police authorities; I declare to you that as surely as my name is Richelieu, if you don't tell me the names of these two insolent masks who insist on remaining covered on my premises, I will attack you, with Rafté, who acts as my provost when occasion demands. Ho there, Rafté! go and get a sword, and have at them, have at them!"

"Hold, hold!" cried Pecquigny, who knew the duke's intractable character, and saw the gleam of his naked weapon; "hold, O thou peaceable philosopher! thou virtuous ambassador! do you not guess who the smallest of the three is, come?"

"What! how the devil do you suppose I can guess? I 'm no Œdipus."

"The smallest of us —"

"Well?"

"Is the greatest."

"The king!" Richelieu could not restrain the words.

"Hush!"

"What! that virtuous and uncorrupted monarch goes about the streets at night insulting women!"

"Silence!"

"How did such things happen? Really, my dear

fellow, the more you tell me, the more inquisitive you make me."

"*Pardieu!* it 's very simple; while we were seeking an adventure we fell in with a lady and her maid."

"Wait, wait! In the first place, my dear —"

"What is it?"

"Let me get rid of these villanous archers, who will end by arousing the whole quarter."

Pecquigny realized the advisability of that step, and withdrew a few paces.

The duke opened the door in his dressing-gown, lantern in hand.

"What 's all this, Messieurs?" said he, in the tone of one accustomed to command, "and what are you doing at my door at this hour?"

"Oh, pardon, Monsieur le Duc," said the sergeant, suddenly descending from his tower of wrath, which grew very fast before a closed door, but melted away before an open one.

"Well, well! what grudge have you against him, this Monsieur le Duc, to spoil his night's rest in this way?"

"Monseigneur! Monseigneur! it is —"

"What is it?" demanded the duke, majestically.

"It is that three of your people made a disturbance in the street, and we are looking for them."

"How do you know that they were my people?"

"Because we saw them take shelter on your premises."

"That 's no reason at all."

"It makes no difference, Monsieur le Duc; whether they were your people or not, those who made the disturbance are on your premises all the same, and your residence is not considered a church, and therefore a safe shelter."

"Upon my word! pleasantry, Monsieur blackguard! We have sown wit so plentifully that everybody is gleaning a little of it, upon my honor! What sort of a disturbance did these gentlemen create, pray?"

"Monseigneur knows all the beautiful women in Paris, does he not?"

"Yes, almost."

"Whether princesses of the blood, noble ladies, or common citizenesses?"

"What then, sergeant?"

"Monseigneur should know *la belle* Paulmier, then?"

"The hostess of the *Lion parlant?* I know only that of her."

"She is a virtuous woman."

"Indeed!" said the duke; "go on."

"Well, she was passing through Rue Saint-Honoré with her maid. Your people —"

"I have already told you, sergeant, that those gentlemen were not my people."

"Those gentlemen, then," continued the sergeant, "approached her more than familiarly, and the smallest of the three began to kiss her; yes, to kiss her, — a most humiliating thing."

"Upon my word!" said Richelieu.

"Meanwhile," the sergeant continued, "the tallest was chucking the maid under the chin. So these two honest persons began to scream, fit to break your heart."

"But what were they doing in the streets at such a time of night, these two estimable creatures?"

"They were going to call the guard, Monsieur le Duc."

"What! going to call the guard! Did they foresee that they were going to be insulted?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur le Duc, they wanted the guard to separate some people of quality who were having a fight in Mademoiselle Paulmier's house."

"Why did n't they tell the little fellow so? That would have had a restraining effect upon him perhaps."

"Oh, indeed! the little fellow! a perfect demon incarnate, Monsieur le Duc. 'The guard!' he cried. 'Ah, you want the guard! good; wait!' And taking Mademoiselle Paulmier by the waist, he dragged her off, in spite of her heroic struggles, kissing her all the while, mark you, as far as the post of the Swiss guards of the Louvre."

"Well, when he got there, what did he do?"

"There, Monsieur le Duc, there the real offence began; because, you understand, to kiss a young woman, even though she be pretty, prettier than Mademoiselle Paulmier, — which could hardly be, however, — is not a crime; but the little rascal, mimicking an august voice, began to call — "

"To call whom?"

"'Forestier,' he cried, 'Forestier!'"

"Who is Forestier?" asked Richelieu.

"He is the commandant of the Swiss at that point, Monsieur le Duc, the real commandant."

"Very good."

"No, very bad, on the contrary; for out comes Monsieur Forestier, thinking that he recognized the king's voice; out comes his sword in the midst of his men, and he shouts, 'It's the king who calls; *mordieu!* it's the king.' And thereupon all the Swiss jump for their swords and their carbines. They rush about and tumble over one another, and search the street — "

"And find?"

"Mademoiselle Paulmier in a terrible state, and not

another thing; the little villain, the little impostor, had made his escape with his companions."

"And the Swiss?" asked Richelieu, laughing heartily in spite of himself.

"Ah, Monsieur le Duc, the rage of the Swiss was beyond all bounds; but as Mademoiselle Paulmier told her story, as the virtue of our well-beloved king is well known, and as the guard-house had been left unguarded, and Monsieur Forestier suspected a surprise, he ordered a retreat."

"It was prudent."

"So the Swiss went back to their post; but luckily they met us, just as we were consoling the heart-broken Mademoiselle Paulmier. She informed us as to the direction her assailants had taken, and we darted in pursuit of them. After five minutes we discovered them walking tranquilly along the street, just as if they had not been turning the whole quarter upside down. We charged them, and they escaped us only by entering your grounds."

"A bad business this!" said the duke affably to the sergeant of the squad,— "bad for everybody except you, my friend, and your worthy soldiers; for although I do not desire that my people should be arrested as they deserve, I do desire that they should pay the cost of their frolic. Come, gentlemen, come, pay up!" said the duke, turning to the culprits.

He held out his hand.

Three well-lined purses fell into it.

"My children," said the duke to the archers, "take this, and be cautious, even after you have drunk up all that these purses contain in honor of my safe

ant received the gold with palpable satisfac-

tion, shared it loyally with his acolytes,— that is to say, he gave them one purse, and kept two for himself alone; then he and they disappeared.

"Now," said the duke with perfect courtesy, "excuse me, gentlemen, for not having received you as I should have been glad to do; beneath a mask every man is free, and authorizes freedom of treatment from others."

With these words the duke made a reverence with a manner quite free from embarrassment. The three men saluted him in return; and when Pecquigny had seen that the coast was clear, they left the garden.

The smallest of the three, as he went out, made a motion to Richelieu, which was meant to be expressive of his gratitude.

The duke remained alone with Rafté in his garden.

They gazed at one another.

"Well, Monsieur le Duc," asked Rafté, "what do you make of this?"

"*Cordieu!* Rafté, you were right," said the duke, absorbed in thought.

"Have I a keen scent, Monsieur le Duc?"

"Oh! I never doubted it, Rafté!"

"Now, Monsieur, you can safely go to bed again."

"Do you think so, Rafté?"

"I am sure of it, Monsieur. In adventures, as in gambling secrets, there is a regular progression, of which the culminating point marks the end. After what has just happened, expect nothing more, or rather expect everything."

"Rafté," said the duke, "you are a delightful fellow. Do you know how to read and write?"

"What, Monsieur le Duc?"

"I ask you, Monsieur Rafté, if you can read and write?"

"Oh, I can scribble and stutter."

"Rafté, from this moment you are my secretary; and if I am ever elected to the Academy —"

He paused a moment.

"You shall write my discourse."

"Oh, Monsieur le Duc!"

"You shall, or the devil take me!"

"Will Monseigneur retire once more?" asked the valet-secretary.

"No, I cannot; I have too much to think about; no, leave me, Rafté."

"The fire is burning, Monsieur le Duc; so I will leave you."

Richelieu was left alone.

"And that's the temperament which Madame de Prie expects me to play the censor of morals to! What! give myself so much trouble to annoy this charming youth, instead of catering to his pleasures at so little pains!"

He mused a few moments more.

"Let others scorch themselves in the flames of virtue," said he. "I certainly was not born to be a kill-joy. I have vigorous lungs, the spark is all prepared, and the matter is combustible; let us blow on it. *Morbleu!* let us blow on it! Moreover, I could not extinguish it if I tried."

LIV.

THE QUEEN'S CARD-PARTY.

MONSIEUR DE RICHELIEU did not fail, however, notwithstanding his reflections, to go to the queen's assembly that same evening; he had made a promise which he could not break without embroiling himself with the marquise.

He was expected. All the restrained impatience of the court burst forth when he appeared. The queen alone did not seem to notice him.

This excellent princess had made Richelieu her bugbear. The duke's prowess had reached her ears when she was still nothing more than a lowly young girl; and all this parade of vice, which seemed such a fine thing at Versailles, was, in the eyes of the chaste daughter of King Stanislas, varnish awkwardly laid on to cover up shocking crimes.

So she had sworn active hatred against this corrupter of morals. On his side the duke found it impossible to care for her; and the result of this mutual enmity could not fail to be disastrous for the schemes of Madame de Prie, which depended for a successful issue upon the cordial co-operation of Monsieur de Richelieu and the queen.

The queen was constrained, so to speak, to look at Richelieu, whom she would have preferred not to see. The duke approached and made his reverence with that perfection of courtesy in which he was without a peer. With marvellous tact he had realized the queen's hostil-

ity to him as soon as he crossed the threshold, simply by the almost imperceptible movement of her shoulders when his name was announced.

"Bonjour, Monsieur," said she, coldly, and turned her attention at once to her game of cavagnole.

The duke was not the man to sue for favor, he knew too well that that brings one into contempt; nor was he the man to humble himself too far before a woman, though that woman were the queen: he knew too well that women prefer the arrogant to the humble.

But his reputation as a courtier and a man of spirit demanded that he should not be content with so cold and so evidently unfriendly a reception.

What would be said in diplomatic circles? A diplomatist meeting with such a rebuff on his first appearance would have lost his prestige at once.

The duke had come home with his memory burdened with a crowd of German princesses, Polish portraits, and souvenirs dear to the heart of Marie Leczinska; he was sure that at the first hint of this family gossip the disdainful princess would at once give him her ear. Monsieur de Richelieu speculated upon everything, even upon good qualities.

"Madame," said he, "I cannot take leave of your Majesty, engrossed as you seem to be in your game, without repeating all the messages, affectionate for the woman, and respectful for the queen, which the Princesses of Brunswick, Wolfenbuttel, and Nassau charged me to deliver."

The queen turned quickly around.

"Ah!" said she; "so they still think of me in those parts?"

It was Richelieu's golden opportunity to perpetrate one of those compliments which he so often found effectual;

he contented himself however with bowing modestly, and, having effected his purpose, withdrew from the queen's side.

She watched him as he walked away, and became thoughtful; she would have been glad that the interview should continue. For a long time she struggled against the desire, but at last, being weaker than her heart, she yielded to it.

She was something more than a kind-hearted princess, was our poor late queen; she was a woman of many excellent parts.

"Monsieur le Duc," said she, "did you not see my dear friend the Comtesse de Koenigsmarck at Vienna?"

"Indeed I did, Madame," replied the duke, returning to her side with respectful eagerness; "and Madame la Comtesse never spoke of your Majesty without tears in her eyes, — it was very affecting."

"What!" cried the queen, with some constraint; "affecting! I thought that the emotions of the heart were considered absurd by men."

"Madame," rejoined Richelieu, gravely, "deign to believe that whatever demonstrates sincere feeling affects men of good heart very deeply; and when the admiration which his queen inspires is in question, a good Frenchman, a gentleman, prides himself upon never being indifferent."

This reply produced considerable effect upon the queen, who glanced stealthily at the duke, and said nothing.

Richelieu had won his case.

Certain it is that at that moment the duke might, if he had been bent upon it, have begun negotiations in accordance with the plans of Monsieur le Duc de Bourbon.

Virtue was enthroned.

But at this point the king came in. His Majesty was resplendent with youth and beauty. Nothing in France at that time, as was universally admitted, equalled the adorable and gracious majesty of her youthful monarch.

The king seemed to be very much absorbed in the demeanor of his wife.

When the duke saw how handsome he was, he was interested to observe what effect his appearance would produce upon the queen.

Marie Leczinska rose, made the customary reverences, and took her seat again, having given to etiquette what etiquette demanded, nothing more.

The king, on the other hand, had blushed as he caught sight of the queen, who, if not beautiful, was at least interesting, with her air of suffering and languor.

But when, instead of the fire which burned in his own glance, he detected in the queen no signs of sympathetic ardor as he would have liked to do, a cloud, almost like the shadow of anger, passed across his face; he sighed very low, and began to look with more attention at the beautiful blushing creatures who were courtesying on all sides, and exhibiting to his gaze, by virtue of their court costumes, a most entrancing vision of white shoulders and dazzling arms.

"Marie Leczinska," thought Richelieu, "is her own executioner; she 's not even jealous."

Indeed the queen went on calmly arranging her markers and counters.

Louis XV. with heaving chest eagerly inhaled the perfumes and the incense of the ladies.

He caught sight of the duke standing respectfully apart, ready to pay his respects when the king should pass near him.

As he approached, the king's face wore a slight smile, instinct with sly good-humor.

The conversation, which had been so restrained and cold on the queen's part, was carried on very earnestly and warmly by the king.

Richelieu, when questioned concerning his travels, framed his replies in a manner to inflame the king's imagination and arouse his interest. But after a while, having noticed how impenetrably silent the duke was upon the subject of the events of the night before, the king, who was very bashful, and, like all bashful people, very fond of everybody who did not annoy him, laid a hand upon Richelieu's arm, and said, —

"Duke, you have seen the queen, and you have seen me; now you must seek out Monsieur le Cardinal."

"Such was my purpose and my wish, Sire, and I await only your Majesty's permission."

"Very well! Monsieur le Cardinal will be much pleased with you, I am sure."

"My respect for him will endow me with the power to please him, Sire."

"The cardinal is a very learned man, and an excellent adviser. You have had much experience yourself, Monsieur le Duc."

This word "experience," in the young king's mind, denoted all the longing admiration of youth for the science of good and evil in which they of maturer years were so well informed, particularly Monsieur de Richelieu, who had nibbled so early in life at the tree which bears it.

"Enough, Sire," replied the duke, "to enable me to render my services more useful to your Majesty."

"Duke, I shall never forget it. Go, pray, and see Monsieur le Cardinal, and say to him that — "

He looked cautiously about. Richelieu listened attentively.

"Say to him," continued Louis, with a gloomy expression, and a frown which would have made the Olympe of Versailles tremble, had it appeared upon the brow of Louis XIV.,—"say to him that I am weary and bored."

"Your Majesty bored!" cried Richelieu, simulating utter amazement.

"Yes, Duke."

"With your youth, your beauty, your manly vigor, and with the kingdom of France!"

"It is just on account of all those things that I am wearied and bored to death, Duke. My youth and my vigor prevent me from ruling as I would like; the kingdom of France prevents me from amusing myself as I might do."

"Sire, ennui is a fatal disease; I would not allow your Majesty to be without a physician."

"Good! the cardinal would laugh if he heard you; he has always insisted upon it that a man cannot be bored on this earth."

"Sire," said the duke, "it is very clear that Monsieur le Cardinal has not confided to you all his expedients for diverting his mind."

It was the first time that ever courtier had ventured a pleasantry before the king upon the subject of his venerated preceptor. Monsieur de Richelieu realized that he was running a great risk, but he chose to play a bold game in the hope of winning more.

The king was not angry; on the contrary, after a moment's silence, he replied very graciously,—

"Duke, Monsieur de Fleury has done very well not to teach me all the ways of diverting myself at once; if I have any time to live, I shall at least have some new things to learn."

"I will answer for it," said Richelieu.

"You will help me, Duke?"

"At your Majesty's commands."

"Go to see Monsieur le Cardinal, then, I beg you."

"To-morrow, Sire."

"And say to him —"

"That your Majesty is weary; yes, Sire."

"And that I would like to go to war for amusement," added the king, with a hypocritical smile, which aroused the duke's deep admiration, after their free conversation in which he had thought that he caught a glimpse of the king's heart, and had construed his inclinations as being much more amorous than warlike.

"Sire," said he, finally adopting the part which was assigned to him, "I shall make it my glory to serve your Majesty in whatever direction you desire my services; I hope that my interview with Monsieur le Cardinal will result in some plan which will make your Majesty more contented."

The king turned upon his heel, and Richelieu bowed to the ground.

"Unless Madame de Prie ranges herself with me, I shall not be on her side; that's decided," said the duke to himself.

His carriage awaited him; he exchanged a few words with Pecquigny, who overtook him at the door.

"Well, Pecquigny?" said he.

"Well, Duke, you have made a conquest of the king."

"Nonsense! Tell me who the third of last night's masks was?"

"Bachelier, the king's first valet-de-chambre."

"Thanks."

Richelieu returned home quite alone.

END OF VOL. I.

OLYMPE DE CLÈVES

Volume II.

Book Two

OLYMPE DE CLÈVES.

I.

MONSIEUR DE FRÉJUS' VALET-DE-CHAMBRE.

Monsieur de Richelieu had given his word to the king, and did not propose to break it. He went therefore the next day to call upon Monsieur le Cardinal de Fleury, in the capacity of an ambassador returning from his mission.

Monsieur le Cardinal de Fleury, ex-bishop of Fréjus, deserves a few descriptive strokes of our pen, if for no other purpose than to enable the reader to understand the part which he is to play in this narrative.

He was, at the date in question, a scheming, blasé, old churchman, as Beaumarchais called him later; an aged man, with a young man's passion for intrigue, a mind fertile in paltry schemes, which he had studied up at his leisure during the reign of Louis XIV. under cover of the skirts of Père La Chaise and Madame de Maintenon.

He knew the court thoroughly, and he was sure of the king; several attempts which had been made to oust him had turned to the confusion of his enemies, and yet he had not appeared to exult in his triumph in the least.

On the contrary, at each new demonstration of his power, he seemed to become even more humble than before.

On three critical occasions, when his influence had seemed to be trembling in the balance, the young king had demanded, with tears and shrieks of anger, the return of his old master, who had accustomed him to playthings and bonbons, and the utmost liberty in everything which did not tend to alienate him from himself.

Thus Fleury possessed the secret which enables men to take the measure of all those with whom they have to deal, — a secret of marvellous efficacy to one who aims at real power; the talent of hiding behind a throne, and pulling hidden wires which move the arms and tongue of the automaton who struts about with the high-sounding title of king.

At this moment it was Fleury's aim to get rid of Monsieur le Duc de Bourbon, First Minister, whose appointment to that office after the regent's death had been made at the suggestion of the cardinal himself.

Scandalous tongues whispered that Fleury aspired to hold the reins of government himself; people devoid of susceptibility declared that Monsieur le Duc deserved the cardinal's hostility on account of his manner of life, which perpetuated the memories of the regency, under a king whose character thus far seemed to be essentially moral and reformative.

The fact is that Monsieur de Bourbon, or rather Madame de Prie, longed to overthrow the cardinal, who was not in sympathy with the queen, and that the cardinal was looking for weak points in the armor of the minister, and testing it in all the joints at all times.

From the conversation between the Duc de Richelieu

and Madame de Prie we know what Monsieur le Duc's vulnerable spots were; and perhaps it is to be wondered at that there was not more real sympathy between those whose moral qualities were so well matched.

But the reader who should make up his mind in this matter without considering Monsieur de Richelieu would incur great risk of going astray. That gentleman had not returned from Vienna to hold himself aloof from all these court intrigues of which our sojourn in the provinces has kept us in ignorance thus far, but in which we are now about to plunge up to the waist.

The duke made his appearance at the cardinal's apartments.

Fleury, carrying simplicity to such a point that it became parade, spent most of his time at Issy, at the convent of his friends the Sulpicians, and assisted them to the utmost of his power in persecuting the Jansenists of France.

He had studied theology most thoroughly before passing to transcendental politics.

Accompanied by his confessor, the Abbé de Polet, and Barjac, his valet-de-chambre, each of whom possessed great influence over him, he went back and forth to Issy with an affectation of great modesty, — the modesty of a priest who had become cardinal, and hoped to become Pope!

The courtier mob was always very assiduous in calling upon him at Issy, when he, cardinal, governor of the king, and master of France, vouchsafed to allow the doors of that hermitage to be opened, — doors at which every one must humbly knock, and which were better guarded than those of the Louvre.

There Monsieur Hercule de Fleury secretly formed a court of his own, the primary purpose of which was to

aid him in his ambitious designs, and raise him to that height of power which he secretly coveted.

Affecting good fellowship with the sons of the "roués" of the regency, who dared not, in the presence of the king's former preceptor, sit at the table where their fathers, boon companions of the regent, had celebrated their nightly orgies, the bishop had, properly speaking, no declared enemy.

I except the military class, who had been clever enough to see through him; but it was a rare faculty at that time.

The cast of the old preceptor's mind was entirely unique; it was so constituted as to prevent him from ever lifting the veil even from what he wished to expose to view.

People with a specialty always think they have solved the problem of universality. To excel in one thing is to offend the whole race of envious men, and to arouse more hard feeling than perfection in all directions.

Thus the common herd of courtiers had as much veneration for and confidence in Monsieur de Fleury, as the old prelate could possibly ask for. Although his ambition was carefully concealed in his own bosom, heavily veiled, if one may so speak, yet a class of people so clear-sighted as those who always infest the antechambers of a new court were able to divine how high a position he might occupy if he chose; he seemed to despise it, and he was generally thought the more of at court for despising it.

The bishop, clever diplomatist that he was, availed himself with admirable tact of the partial favors which were calculated to pave his way to the possession of the absolute power which he coveted.

Mazarin, that pupil of Richelieu, who replaced Louis

XIII. in the bed of Anne of Austria, and built up for himself a degree of power which the cardinal his predecessor had tried in vain to acquire,— Mazarin and Richelieu seemed to Fleury to be mere pygmies, compared with the figure which he himself hoped to make, with the aid of the favorable opportunities which seemed to be in store for him.

This man of humble origin, raised to his present elevation by the merest chance, had been offered a peerage in the new promotion, and had refused it with contempt.

He had neither the power nor the inclination to ascend the uncertain rounds of the ladder of power too quickly. He preferred a slower but less perilous progress. The rounds upon which everything seemed to make it advisable for him to rest his weight were too weak in his eyes, and would have given way under him.

To prepare day after day some petty intrigue for the morrow; to work one week so as to score a point the following week, if the whim seized him; to search throughout a whole month the means of scoring a point the following month, if his inspiration did not fail him, — such was his life, such his incessant occupation, since his interests had connected him with the court. Louis XV., great-grandson of Louis XIV., who might say, like his ancestor, "I am the State!" could not say that he belonged to France, or even that he belonged to himself; he was Fleury's, and Fleury had raised himself to power on his own account, and to forward his own fortunes.

Thus it was that Fleury was jealous of everybody, especially of the queen, — the first object of the king's idolatry, when the lessons of his preceptor ceased, and his playthings became indifferent to him.

The queen appreciated the situation; she returned Fleury's hatred, and undertook to counterbalance his

influence with the Duc de Bourbon and Madame de Prie, her sponsors when her alliance with the kingdom of France was entered into.

Richelieu, the night before his visit to Issy, by accepting the queen's cold reception without a struggle, had managed his cards so as to facilitate a close alliance with the cardinal. We will follow him as he goes to Issy to carry out the details of his game.

Fleury was expecting him. This hermit, this man of simple habits, knew what took place at court better than the lieutenant of police.

Richelieu, fully informed as to his habits, prepared on the journey to accommodate himself to them. He had reason to congratulate himself that he had done so, for in the reception-room he encountered Barjac.

This Barjac was a singular sort of man; grown old in the service of the cardinal, whose fortunes he had helped to build and to support, Barjac had acquired by thirty years of fidelity and devotion such an ascendancy over his master that the latter yielded to him not only the material direction of his life, but a good part of the spiritual as well.

Barjac owed his master's confidence and his own influence to very great tact combined with a strong admixture of outspokenness; he really loved and admired the cardinal, — a fact which was in itself no mean proof of his good disposition; and as he was sincerely devoted to the cardinal's interests, he was excused for paying some little attention to his own.

A political valet he was; he said *we* in speaking of business matters, just as he used to say *our plate* and *our estate* in speaking of Monsieur de Fréjus' private affairs.

To be on the right side of Barjac was an essential requisite in dealing with His Grandeur, who very fre-

quently, when his own table was full, would send the most distinquished courtiers to Barjac's quarters, with these words, —

"There is no more room here; go and dine with Barjac."

In the remark of Cardinal Richelieu, "Messieurs, I claim to serve the king," and Fleury's, "Messieurs, go and dine with Barjac," is included the whole history of France from 1620 to 1720, a century of decrepitude and servility.

But this omnipotent Barjac was nobody's fool, nor was he easily led by burning incense at his feet; many a courtier had burned his fingers in the attempt. Barjac was very clever in pouring the hot coals upon those who waved the vessel unskilfully.

One day a certain duke and peer, coming to dine with him, had saluted and embraced him, and shown him a thousand familiar attentions at table, as from equal to equal. Barjac rose, took a napkin in each hand, and waited upon the great man, saying, —

"Monsieur, since you forget yourself thus with Barjac, it is doubly important that poor Barjac should not forget the respect due to you."

Such an antagonist was not easy to subdue.

Richelieu entered the reception-room.

"Ah, Barjac, good morning!" said he; "how are you?"

"Monsieur le Duc!" cried Barjac, with an assumed expression of open-mouthed astonishment.

"Home from a long distance, Barjac! Ah! you are growing stout, my friend."

"Do you think so, Monsieur le Duc?"

"That's the result of not bothering one's brain with politics!"

Barjac smiled significantly.

"Monseigneur has had a pleasant journey?" said he.

"Excellent! Is Monsieur de Fréjus visible?"

"He was not expecting you, but he will be very glad to see you."

"You will do me a great service, my dear Barjac, if you can arrange it so that I may see him alone."

"One moment, please," said Barjac; "we have a lot of people this morning, all on last week's business. It's the remains of that wretched Spanish affair, of which you know something."

"Yes," said Richelieu; "her Catholic Majesty absolutely will not listen to reason."

"After all," said Barjac, "we must admit that we wounded her cruelly in sending back the Infante. Put yourself in her place, Monsieur le Duc! Suppose you had children established in a foreign land, and they should be unceremoniously sent back to you, like lost merchandise?"

"You are right, it will last forever."

"Only on the part of the Queen of Spain; for the king —"

"Oh! his Catholic Majesty Philippe V. bears no malice; indeed he hardly has any reason to do so now. But tell me, dear Barjac, will Monsieur le Cardinal keep me waiting long?"

Barjac, the valet Barjac, whose petty eminence never availed to put him at ease in the presence of noble blood, which always subdued his pretensions, was delighted with the duke's lapses into familiarity, and made off at once to announce him to the cardinal.

The duke was immediately ushered into the presence. As he appeared upon the theshold, a stern-featured old man, of fine carriage, who was seated beside Fleury, rose, bowed with much gravity, and left the room, not

without recognizing the formal, self-important salute of Monsieur de Richelieu.

This old man was second only to Monsieur de Fleury in power; we ought rather to say that he shared his power.

It was Père Polet, his confessor, the implacable persecutor of the Jansenists, who needed only Louis XIV. and an opportunity, to banish the heresies of Messieurs Arnauld and Nicolle from French soil.

The duke remained alone with the cardinal.

II.

MONSIEUR DE FRÉJUS, PRECEPTOR OF KING LOUIS XV.

THE cardinal was advanced in years, but still vigorous. To an unctuous and persuasive amiability he added a sort of pulpit eloquence which at certain times and on certain subjects gave to these private interviews the solemnity which his absolute lack of genius made impossible on great occasions.

He had the calm, piercing gaze of the priest, accustomed to look beneath the spoken thought and to search the conscience.

In what one said to him he listened only to what one did not say. He paid little attention to the form of speech, and rarely failed to divine what lay behind it.

Monsieur de Fleury, Abbé at first, then Bishop of Fréjus, then Cardinal, — a man of moderate parts, and who nevertheless occupied for a long time the loftiest position in Europe, absolute in his apparent humility, — Monsieur de Fleury, we say, followed out the traditions of the last reign in his policy for twenty years. You would have said that Louis XIV. was away for a while, and Père Le Tellier was filling the vacancy.

Fleury began by greeting Richelieu with much courtesy; and the ambassador, as may be imagined, was not behindhand with him. With his unfailing tact, he had divined, from Monsieur de Fleury's manner of saluting him and from his expression, that he might be of good courage.

The cardinal complimented him in fitting terms upon the success of his mission to the emperor.

"Monseigneur," replied Richelieu, "my task was an easy one, for I had your suggestions to guide me."

"That makes no difference," said Fleury; "it was difficult for one so young as you to convince those Germans, whose brains work slowly from their cradles."

Richelieu smiled.

"Monseigneur," he replied, "appearances have misled you. I am no longer young."

"So they say," said Monsieur de Fréjus, smiling in his turn. "Can it be true?"

"Oh, in one word, Monseigneur, I can make you understand why I no longer need to be young."

"Say that word, Monsieur le Duc."

"I have become ambitious."

"Good! That ought to happen sooner or later to the grand-nephew of the great cardinal."

"Well, Monseigneur, it has happened."

"Does your ambition tend toward a military or a diplomatic career?"

"Either, as his Majesty may choose."

As he said these words, the duke bowed in a way to make clear to Fleury that although he put a false address on the letter he was mailing, he desired that it should reach the person for whom it was intended.

Fleury gave him a friendly little nod, which implied that he perfectly understood him.

"You are in favor with the king, Monsieur le Duc?" asked he.

"I hope so, Monsieur. I arrived home only day before yesterday, and I have bothered nobody for two years."

"How did you find the king?"

"Delightful."

"Is he not?"

"And his manners truly royal, upon my word — Only —"

"Only what, pray?" demanded Monsieur de Fréjus.

"Well, if I must say it, the king is bored to distraction."

"What's that you say?"

"Official information, Monseigneur; for it was the king in person who instructed me to convey it to you."

"The king is bored?"

"Yes, bored to death."

"It is n't possible!"

"It is really so, Monseigneur."

"He told you so himself?"

"Last evening, in so many words."

"Where was it?"

"At the queen's card-party, which I attended, as duty demanded."

The last six words interrupted a grimace upon the cardinal's lips, where the first five had caused it to appear.

"Oh! indeed, this news is of the last importance!" said the cardinal, happy to be fairly drawn into the conversation by Richelieu's delicate tact. "Let us look into this, Monsieur le Duc, if you have a moment to give me."

"All my life, Monsieur."

"Well, then, let us avail ourselves of it to talk a little."

He rang, and Barjac appeared.

"Turn everybody away, Barjac," said he; "I am tired, and shall not see anybody else to-day."

Barjac smiled at Richelieu and went out.

"I cannot get over what you just told me!" cried Monsieur de Fréjus; "and if it were not you —"

"You know that I do not lie any more."

"Not any more, — never?"

"No, Monseigneur, never!"

"Oh, Duke!"

"Upon my honor! Except at Vienna, to the Spaniards; even then it was but two or three times."

"For the good of the service?"

"I had absolution for it."

"Extraordinary man! you are still the same?"

"Oh, no, Monseigneur; I have already told you that I am so changed that I can't recognize myself now."

"I mean that you must still be attended to before any one else."

"That's not my fault, Monseigneur."

"Whose is it then, pray?"

"It is the fault of the people who are kind enough to make me out of more importance than I really am."

"For instance, I intended to speak to you about the king only, and have ended by speaking about nobody but yourself."

"A wretched subject, Monseigneur."

"Don't laugh. You say that you really procured absolution, do you?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, for I am very devout."

"Ah, Duke!" said the old fellow, shaking his head, "I seem still to hear in my ears the buzzing of certain reports from Vienna which are rather inconsistent with all these miracles of conversion."

"I know what you mean, unless I am much mistaken," rejoined Richelieu.

"Yes, a certain episode —"

"Of sorcery?"

"Precisely so."

"Pray, Monseigneur, do me, a poor foreigner, the honor to tell me how the story was told here; then I will myself give you the true version."

"Oh, it 's quite short. It was said that you and the Abbé de Sinzendorf went to make some experiments in natural magic."

"Where, Monseigneur?"

"In an out-of-the-way spot, near Vienna, — a stone-quarry, I believe, — and that there, the magician having shown you too much or too little of the devil, you had a quarrel with him, as a sequel to which the poor devil (I mean the magician of course) was found dead, — let us not mince words, — murdered."

"All this is the exact truth, Monseigneur, except that just one word should be stricken out — "

"The word 'murdered,' is it not?"

"If you please."

"Neither you nor Monsieur de Sinzendorf, then — "

"Neither Monsieur de Sinzendorf nor myself murdered the magician."

"He died, however?"

"It is true that he played us that scurvy trick; but this is how the thing came about."

"Let 's hear it."

"Monsieur de Sinzendorf and myself both had our horoscopes cast."

"You admit it?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, and there was the sin."

Monsieur de Fleury signified his approval as a theologian by a nod of the head.

"The sorcerer began by telling us a few truths and many lies. He posted us on certain court secrets, unknown in diplomatic circles."

"Aha! he was a sorcerer of good family, then?"

"Then he offered to procure for each of us what would please us most."

"You asked him, I suppose, that you might always be a favorite with the ladies?"

"*Mon Dieu!* No, Monseigneur, that's just the difficulty. I was fatuous enough to think that that request was unnecessary."

"Indeed!"

"I asked for the key to the heart of princes."

"Oh, yes, I see, I see; your ambitious ideas were to the fore."

"They began to germinate about that time, Monseigneur."

"Well, did he supply you with that key?"

"Monseigneur, the business was just coming to a close, when an unexpected event interfered with our plans. Monsieur de Sinzendorf, caring little for the key to the heart of princes, since he claimed to possess it already, asked for the key to the female heart."

"The sorcerer could thus content both, without disobliging either."

"The drama begins at this point, Monseigneur. Scarcely had he let fall those careless words than the sorcerer replied that, for certain people, the key to the hearts of women was a useless piece of furniture, since women have no hearts."

"Oho!" exclaimed Monsieur de Fleury.

"That was a slight exaggeration; so thought Monsieur de Sinzendorf, who caught the ball on the bound, and denounced the sorcerer's statement as a slander."

"Pshaw!"

"It was but natural, Monseigneur. Monsieur de Sinzendorf was at that moment deeply attached to a lady upon whose affection he believed he could rely."

"*Vanitas vanitatum,*" muttered Monsieur de Fleury.

"Whether the sorcerer had heard of this passion, or really divined it by his art, he retorted: 'Monsieur, Madame ——, whom you love, is the worst example you could select to support your opinion of women.'"

"Oho!" said Fleury, "there was no button on that foil."

"No, and it cut Monsieur de Sinzendorf to the quick; an angry flush rose to his temples.

"'Villain!' he cried, 'you lie!'

"'Monsieur,' the sorcerer replied calmly, 'one ought never to give the lie to anybody, still less to a sorcerer,—especially one ought never to insult a man whom one has disturbed for one's own purposes.'"

"A very sensitive sorcerer that."

"That is just the thought that came to my mind, Monseigneur. His sensitiveness surprised me. It seemed to me that I could see something more under all this than Monsieur de Sinzendorf believed himself to have seen. The spot was ill-chosen, as you said, Monseigneur. We were in the midst of the quarries, a league from Vienna, and in the night-time, without other light than that cast by a sickly moon. The sorcerer seemed a man accustomed to solitude, and quite ready to take advantage of it. I made a sign to Monsieur de Sinzendorf to keep quiet, but it was too late. He had steam up, and I could not stop him. He defied the sorcerer to prove anything discreditable to Madame ——."

"And what said the sorcerer then?" asked Monsieur de Fleury.

"Ah, Monseigneur, the sorcerer's evil genius urged him on. He talked and talked nearly half an hour, and in that space he told Monsieur de Sinzendorf, who

shrivelled up and flushed and turned white as he heard,—told him things which made me laugh and tremble at the same time."

"What sort of a man was he, in Heaven's name?"

"He was an unfortunate man, Monseigneur; he drove Monsieur de Sinzendorf to desperation, and he undertook to chastise him; seeing which, the accursed sorcerer drew from some hiding-place among the rocks a short, thick sword, and received Monsieur de Sinzendorf's attack so roughly that the game bade fair to become disastrous for my companion."

"What sort of a man was the abbé?" asked Monsieur de Fleury.

"The abbé was a well-taught and well-set-up man, but he had a dangerous opponent to deal with. He was attacked by the sorcerer with such vigor that I thought it was high time for me to become an actor in the drama instead of a simple spectator. My purpose was to save Monsieur de Sinzendorf's life; a false step would have been the end of him; he was completely overmatched. He slipped back and fell; the sorcerer leaped upon him to make an end of him."

"Why, was it the devil himself?"

"His Satanic Majesty *in propria persona*, Monseigneur. I thought so all the time; and the proof—"

"Ah! you have a proof?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, the proof is that he received from me a sword-thrust which entered over the right nipple and came out below the left shoulder, and that not one drop of blood issued from either wound."

"Indeed! but you see that he did receive a thrust of your sword, Duke."

"Yes, and two from Monsieur de Sinzendorf, who was put at his ease again by my succor. We were acting

legitimately in self-defence, and my conscience does not reproach me in the least."

"At all events, you slew the devil; that's the thing that stands out most prominently in all this."

"Monseigneur knows the proverb: 'Better to kill the devil than that the devil —'"

"'Should kill you.' Poor sorcerer! what a pity that he had two madmen like you to deal with! If I had been there in your place, the sorcerer would not have insulted me, nor I the sorcerer. I should have learned all that you learned, and many things besides: such is the reward of patience."

"Oh, Monseigneur, although we were a little hasty, I agree, still the poor devil had had time to tell us a quantity of fine things."

"I believe you; but let us return, I beg, to your conversion."

"It dates from that time, Monseigneur. Being guilty of having almost slain a man for reasons that were far from satisfactory, I broke off all relations with women, with curiosity, and with anger, which are the three principal stumbling-blocks in life."

"But what did the sorcerer tell you?"

"Well, Monseigneur, he pointed out to me an infallible method of making myself the object of the favor of kings."

"Did he require you to swear secrecy?"

"Monseigneur, I certainly could give no lessons on the subject to you, whom the king fairly idolizes; so let me retain for my own use such flowers as I pluck along the road."

"If you are determined to be reticent, keep your plan of operations to yourself; but pray put it in execution at once, Monsieur le Duc. The king is bored, you say; win his favor, then, by diverting his mind."

"That is precisely what I have in view, Monseigneur; it is also the reason of my visit to Issy."

"To Issy, Monsieur le Duc," cried the cardinal, who thought that Richelieu was surrendering too soon, and who preferred that the negotiations should be a little more spun out. "You say that you came to Issy to divert the king? Ah, Monsieur le Duc, what do you expect to find here to report to the king, unless it is weariness and ennui far greater than his own?"

"But you fail to comprehend my meaning, Monseigneur," said the duke. "I never intended to vex with worldly matters the pious retirement in which you live, God forbid! Further than that, my ideas are not worldly."

The cardinal fixed his penetrating glance upon the duke, as if to ask him what sort of ideas he could have, other than those which he was expected to have.

But the duke had studied his part carefully.

"Monseigneur," he continued, "I have done much thinking since I saw how depressed the king is, and my mind has been busy inventing means of diverting him; it is with regard to those means that I desire to ask your advice."

"Ah, that is something like!" cried Fleury. "Go on, Monsieur le Duc, go on! You are a clever fellow, and in the matter of agreeable diversions I think that your opinion must be of the greatest weight. The king turned in the right direction when he turned to you."

Richelieu smiled modestly, like a preacher whom one praises before the sermon.

"Monseigneur," he said, "I have very accurate knowledge of the sentiment which all the kings of Europe have conceived for our young king. It is not mere friendship; it is a sort of paternal feeling, with even

more affection than that word implies. It is what one might call a combination of love and interest."

"What is he coming at?" the cardinal asked himself, resting his elbows upon the table, and seeking to detect the orator's secret thoughts.

"You have learned," continued Richelieu, "that his Majesty is universally called the 'Child of Europe'?"

"I have been told so," replied Fleury; "but I don't quite see —"

"Where I am coming out? I am out now, Monseigneur. With such an expert logician as yourself, I thought that I ought not to neglect the precaution of an exordium. I have to suggest to you a course of travel for the king."

"Travel!" cried Fleury.

"Receptions without end, illuminations everywhere, acclamations of the people, banquets, processions, sea-voyages, will form a source of entertainment which can be made to last for six months, if desired."

"Have the king travel for six months!" repeated the bewildered prelate; "why, you can't mean it, Monsieur le Duc! It is n't possible that you advise me in sober earnest to part from the king for six months!"

"You would not part from the king, Monseigneur, because you would go too."

"I accompany the king!" continued Fleury, moving about uneasily upon his chair. "I live amid continual bustle and confusion! I travel a thousand leagues! Ah, Monsieur le Duc, were you really speaking seriously?"

"With the utmost seriousness of which I am capable, Monseigneur."

"What! kill the king for the sake of amusing him! and kill me too!"

"Oh, Monseigneur, one can travel so comfortably these days; and then what a keystone for a powerful alliance! It would be to build a bridge from France to each of the kingdoms now separated from her by hostile feeling."

The cardinal shook his head with the discouraged expression which the cleverest diplomats cannot dissemble, when their dupe, instead of putting his foot in the trap they have set, slips away and forces them to new combinations.

Richelieu, while apparently disappointed by the small success of his first proposition, was inwardly enjoying the old man's cruel discomfiture.

"Your idea, Monsieur le Duc, may be a most excellent one," the cardinal replied; "but unfortunately it is impracticable."

"Let us give up all hope of diverting the king from his ennui," said Richelieu, struggling with a sigh of enormous proportions.

"You, with your inventive powers, have been able to think of no expedient but that?" queried the cardinal.

"Alas! no, Monseigneur."

"Allow me to suggest to you that if, when you were of the king's age, your father had compelled you to travel with your preceptor, you would not have considered the prospect especially agreeable."

"Oh!" cried Richelieu, "no, indeed, Monseigneur; but what a difference there is between the king and myself! I was born with every evil instinct, and soon acquired all the vices. The king on the other hand has a depth of religious feeling and faith and an abundance of moral principle which fairly amaze me."

"True," said Fleury.

"I was a perverse subject," continued Richelieu; "the

king is a saint. To educate a gentleman is to improve him; to educate a king is to ruin him."

"True, true, and very well put!" cried Fleury, waxing enthusiastic over the maxim which he had so often exposed as his own guide; "but after all, because a king is a king, need he die of ennui?"

"This ennui, Monseigneur, is one of the attributes of royalty."

"Oh, Duke! Duke!"

"Then, Monseigneur, let the king attend to public affairs himself; let him consult with his ministers and manage the finances; let him — let him go to war, and he will not be troubled with ennui."

"You go from one extremity to the other, Duke," said the cardinal, in some alarm. "Divert the king by setting Europe afire, forsooth! and yet you say that you are sobering down!"

"I don't know, then," said Richelieu, sanctimoniously; "but I confess that, having proposed travel, work, and war — "

"Let us think whether there is not something else."

"Most willingly."

"What is there, for instance, in the way of interesting avocations?"

"There is floriculture," said Richelieu; "but the king is rather tired of beanstalks."

The cardinal flushed slightly, but the duke's perfect good faith was so apparent that he could not be angry.

"There is gaming too," said Richelieu.

"That is not a fit amusement for a holy man, Duke; lly is it ill-suited to a king. When the king plays is, the nobles lose; when he plays and loses, the have to pay."

chase?"

"Oh, the king hunts too much now."

"Do you know this is decidedly perplexing; war, travel, work, play, all out of the question. Oh, I forgot one thing which was excessively diverting to Louis XIV., but which his great-grandson has never been suspected of."

"What's that, pray?"

"Buildings, Monseigneur."

"The subject has never been in the king's mind, Duke."

"His Majesty, only eighteen years old, has exhausted all means of amusement! What can we do? His great-grandfather did n't arrive at that wretched state until he was sixty."

With that Richelieu became silent.

Fleury, after watching him a few moments, mildly ventured a few words.

"I am," said he, "the most wretched adviser that the poor prince could have. Being a priest, and advanced in years, I have no right to awaken in him the love of sin."

"Not even the sin of love," said Richelieu, laughing with well-considered freedom.

Fleury looked fixedly at him, and seemed disconcerted by his perfect self-possession.

"A terrible sin that!" said he, in a voice that was hardly audible.

"Which there is no cause to fear that Louis XV. will commit," added Richelieu. "The king's love is his wife."

Fleury had nothing to say to this.

"In fact," continued the duke, "how is it that the king, being so deeply in love, suffers from ennui? There 's a problem for you. The king is mad with love

for the queen, and yet ennui has fastened upon him. The king is a model husband, and still he is bored to death! An incomprehensible state of things truly! You, Monseigneur, who know all the king's secret thoughts — "

The cardinal sighed very noisily.

"What 's the matter?" Richelieu asked him.

Again he sighed.

"*Mon Dieu!* Monseigneur, you terrify me; can it be that the king and queen — "

"Ah, Duke!"

"What, this apparent affection! Oh, it is not possible! Last night only, the king gazed at his wife with eyes that shone like diamonds."

"Duke, I don't know whether the Viennese sorcerer revealed all other secrets to you, but this one he seems to have omitted."

"I come down from my high horse, Monseigneur."

"Listen, Duke; up to a certain point the king is excusable. He was born with an exacting disposition; he is indeed the true descendant of his great-grandfather."

"And the queen is a straight-laced German, is she not?"

"Alas! in that fact lies the cause of my despair!"

"*Mon Dieu!* Monseigneur, but we must straighten out this complication. By so doing we shall assure the repose of the whole world, as well as the welfare of our masters."

"Yes, Duke, yes, we certainly must; for if the king is once really bored and weary, where may he not turn for distraction? It is horrible to think of!"

"You say, Monseigneur, that the king is endowed with a very vigorous and ardent temperament?"

"Fiery, Monsieur le Duc."

"I have always heard that such temperaments needed

to be either subdued or weakened. To subdue them is often impossible, but to weaken them is more practicable. Are not certain means employed to that end, particularly in the religious orders?"

"You refer to those processes which are called *minuantes*, Monsieur le Duc; *minuantes* comes from the Latin word *diminuere*. In the cloisters we call them *minutions*, and the Carthusians are required to submit to them once a year."

"Well, Monseigneur, we might consider — Violent exercise, tennis for instance, swimming, and strict diet."

"Monsieur le Duc, we have agreed, and let us not forget it, that the king is bored, and that we desire to divert him."

"Yes, Monseigneur, it is essential to find something to distract the king's mind from himself."

"I know it well, Monsieur le Duc."

"It is quite true that those things I mentioned would not amuse him. The *minutions* are remedies, and not diversions; let us pass them by."

"I have one scruple, Monsieur le Duc, — you, like a worthy gentleman, will appreciate it: the king's person is sacred, is it not?"

"Inviolable."

"It seems to me, then, that it would be an invasion of that inviolability to bleed the king and to deprive him of food. The process is — "

"Monkish and surgical, true; some ministerial process would be much better."

"You would not resort to it, Monsieur le Duc?"

"I would prefer, I admit, to give all my own blood to the king, and die of hunger myself, to enable him to eat as appetite demands and act according to his natural disposition."

"You see, Duke, we come back to where we started from."

Once more Richelieu's mouth was closed.

"Just now," said Fleury, "a thought came into my head, apropos of that scruple of mine; he who says scruple creates at once a case of conscience. Here is one which presented itself to my mind."

"I am here to listen to you, Monseigneur, and I am listening with all my ears."

"Let us admit that the king, who is the master, — for after all he is the master, — let us admit, I say, that he does as he chooses — "

"We must admit it, Monseigneur."

"That it then becomes our duty — "

"To bow before him, Monseigneur."

"Even if he does wrong?"

"To pity him in that event, and not imitate him," said Richelieu, piously.

"Admirably said, Duke. Now give ear to my case of conscience. Suppose, for instance, that while hunting the king's horse should bolt with him, and be on the point of jumping with him into a ditch twenty feet deep, but that there was on the way another smaller ditch, only three or four feet deep at most — "

"Monseigneur, I would hamstring the horse, so that he would drop the king in the little ditch."

"Would you not? Follow my reasoning, Monsieur le Duc, follow me closely, I beg. However little danger there may be that his ardent nature will lead him into the abyss of sin, yet who can say that even by trivial errors he will not compromise the honor of his name and the welfare of the State?"

"Perfectly reasoned, Monseigneur."

"What shall we do then? Might we not reconcile

ourselves to selecting for the king the ditch into which his fall would be attended with least risk to his honor and that of the State?"

Richelieu pretended to hesitate over this last suggestion, as if he had not perfectly understood it.

"I will explain," continued Fleury, annoyed at having to enter upon details which he would have been glad to abstain from giving, — "I will explain the king's natural inclination for certain forms of pleasure. He will plunge into them blindly; you know his Majesty almost as well as I do, and you cannot have the least doubt of that; the king, I say, will naturally plunge in over head and ears. Ought we not, is it not our sacred bounden duty, to guide this inclination?"

"Very good, very good! I begin to understand, Monseigneur," cried Richelieu.

"How can we do that," rejoined the minister, "unless we seem to favor it?"

Scarcely had the cardinal allowed that imprudent word to fall from his lips than Richelieu, who had been awaiting his opportunity for half an hour, pounced upon it like the hawk upon the partridge. "What! favor, favor the king's debauchery!" he cried, leaping to his feet. "Oh, Monseigneur, what a word for you to use!"

"No, no, I don't mean that, Duke. *Mon Dieu!* no, I don't mean that! Who said anything about debauchery, in the first place?"

"I was amazed to hear you, Monseigneur; for, after all, the king's virtue must be due to you alone, since his temperament would lead him in a diametrically opposite direction."

"Of course, of course; meanwhile he is on the point of losing it."

"You think so?"

"Everything confirms it; he is gradually drawing away from the queen."

"Oh, no, impossible, Monseigneur! They say that the queen is in a condition —"

"That proves absolutely nothing," said the cardinal, with somewhat less regard to propriety than a Bishop of Fréjus should have shown, but without the unctuous gusto with which Cardinal Dubois, successor of Fénelon in the Archbishopric of Cambrai, would have said it. "The queen may give a dauphin to France, and yet not be beloved by her husband. In a word, I think that the king has so many leisure hours on his hands that he has plenty of time to ruin himself by ruining his reputation, as we both agreed just now. I recur to my former opinion. The question is not between good and evil, but between degrees of evil; not to keep the king virtuous, for he seems to have firmly resolved to cease to be so, but to restrict his backsliding as far as we can."

Richelieu raised his eyes heavenward.

"How soon, Duke, do you suppose we shall learn that the poor queen is deserted; how soon will the king declare that his love has gone abroad?"

"Impossible, impossible, Monseigneur, with the principles which your Eminence has instilled in him."

"Ah, Duke, there is danger everywhere; it encompasses us on all sides. There is Mademoiselle de Charolais, who slips verses into the king's pocket with her own hand; there is Madame de Toulouse, who allows the king to make love to her at Rambouillet; there are all the ladies, in short, who seem to say to the king when he passes, 'Look, Sire, your female subjects are at your service, as absolutely as their husbands and brothers.'"

"He will succumb at last, Monseigneur, in spite of all you have done, and all I am ready to do."

'What a terrible responsibility, Monsieur le Duc, for us who have watched the growth of this tendency, who have obligingly borne with it, who have not known how to keep it within bounds, and who will be devoured by it!"

"Oh, what to do! what to do!"

"Oh, weak and timorous conscience!" cried the cardinal. "Oh, how lukewarm and wavering on the side of what is good are you men of the sword, how you fear to use the knife boldly upon the part that is diseased, so that the healthy part may be saved! We poor churchmen, walking beside all the passions without daring to look at them, tremble before public opinion, which calls upon us to be upright and holy, as if we were not mere mortals. We have only one resource, — the councils of the Church; only one unobstructed faculty, — the sight; and when we call men of action to our aid, they fail us, doing more to subvert good morals than we dare to do in the way of repairing wrong."

"Why, Monsieur le Cardinal," cried Richelieu, "I am all ready to assist you, and came here for no other purpose; only of course you do not expect from me the knowledge and experience of a genius like yourself. It has required seventy winters, Monsieur le Cardinal, to bring to full maturity that patriarchal wisdom which will raise you some day to the proud eminence of omnipotent arbiter of the destinies of Europe. I am a young man myself; I have naught left but good intentions, with little power to suggest, on account of the deplorable life I have led. I have cured myself of sin by fleeing from it, and I see it everywhere. I am still ignorant in that I have not yet learned to see the cure for poison in the poison itself. Teach me, enlighten me, and employ me; I am ready to serve you faithfully, that 's all."

"Agree to this, Duke," said the cardinal, in milder tones, "that nothing will moderate the king's impetuosity except a pretence of yielding to it."

"True; and yet a pretence, Monseigneur."

"Agree that I do not feel sufficiently in touch with the world to proclaim these theories; I lay that duty upon you. Agree that the married man who has some peccadillo to reproach himself with is the more eager to demonstrate his affection for his wife."

"It is so said, and I believe it, Monseigneur. That is the effect it would produce on me if I had a wife."

"What! if you had a wife? One would say, Monsieur le Duc, that you really forget that you are married."

"Oh! I am so little married, Monseigneur!"

"But we are not talking about you."

"No, indeed, but of the king."

"Very well, give the king a mistress and he will be on the best of terms with the queen, according to your system."

"Expounded by you, Monseigneur."

"As I was saying, then; very well, let the king have a mistress."

"Yes; but a mistress means public scandal!" cried Richelieu; "and then, too, you make no allowance for jealousy, which will shorten the days of that poor Polish princess."

"Do you think it impossible, then, that the king's backsliding should be concealed from the public?"

"It would be difficult."

"Duke, the queen herself would understand, we would make her understand, that it is the only means of saving him. Must I tell you everything? Well, then, I think that the queen would not be sorry."

"Oh, Monseigneur, oh!"

"I have my reasons for thinking so. The queen is the most phlegmatic creature that ever was."

"Everything will be easy to arrange, then."

"And we shall have assured comparative tranquillity for some time."

"Let us consider, Monseigneur, whether it is worth the trouble."

"Oh, yes, Duke; oh, yes!"

"Has your Eminence already lifted a corner of the curtain which conceals the future?"

"No, I confess that I have not."

"But will not the king cast his eye upon the first comer?"

"I am a novice in such matters, Duke; if I had the honor to be called Richelieu, I should not put such questions to a poor priest."

"Listen then, Monseigneur; I also recoil before the responsibility, myself."

"The best way, Duke, is to prepare our subjects. Whenever you have employed agents in carrying out your missions, you were responsible for them, were you not?"

"Why, yes, Monseigneur."

"What means did you adopt to avoid unpleasant results?"

"I was careful in the choice of agents."

"Exactly! Now I have nothing more to say to you. Make yourself the king's friend, or make up your mind to let that place in Louis XV.'s life which I am giving up go begging for an occupant. Take care that it does n't fall into the hands of one of our enemies. Imagine the result of a combination having at its head either the legitimated offspring of the late king or foreigners like the Spaniards. Distrust the influence of the Northern powers; King Stanislas guides his daughter's policy. I

say no more to you on this point; for, unless I greatly err, you are not on the very best of good terms with the queen."

"All that your Eminence has said bears the stamp of transcendent genius, Monseigneur. And so in case you should hear of the king's diversions, you would have no ill-will against me?"

"By no means, for your acts will be guided by the best interests of the realm."

"In the event of your becoming first minister, whether through Monsieur le Duc's disgust, or the influence of some new idea upon the king, I may be assured that you will not frown upon me?"

"If ever — which I do not think, because I do not wish it — I should become first minister as you suggest, Monsieur le Duc, with obligations to nobody, and out of danger from the designs of the queen, I should hasten to witness my gratitude to you."

"We must be prepared for everything, Monseigneur: the king is at this moment under pressure from Monsieur le Duc. This combination which *we* have thought out, you and I, will release the king, and perhaps be the cause of Monsieur le Duc's downfall; hence, for me, a powerful hostility — "

"Monsieur le Duc, nobody's hostility counts for anything against such a man as you, when he adds to dignities of birth and position the greatest dignities in the gift of the State. 'Do me a favor to-day,' says the Italian proverb, 'and I will do three for you to-morrow.'"

"By the mere fact of rendering a service to your Eminence I am more than paid for what I do," the cunning courtier made haste to say.

The cardinal blushed again and rose. Richelieu had already prepared his farewell speech.

"Monseigneur," said he, "times are hard, and the king receives benefits coldly. Will you promise to ask him for me when I desire anything?"

"You shall make the bargain yourself, Duke."

As he spoke, the cardinal held out his hand to Monsieur le Richelieu.

"Either he or Madame de Prie will have a fall," thought the duke; "but that 's their affair."

"One other word," said the cardinal, placing his hand on the duke's arm; "I rely upon your refined sensibility and perfect taste to see that the king's surroundings are befitting his station."

"Don't say that, Monseigneur; I have received the honor of your confidence, and that is enough for me. From this moment you have but to stretch your hand in any direction whatsoever, and you will see me take that direction."

"Monsieur le Duc, you overwhelm me," said the prelate, escorting Richelieu to the door with more affection than ceremony.

Barjac was waiting for the duke with eyes that shone with delight. It is certain that he had thoroughly learned the valet's accomplishment of listening at keyholes.

"Well, Monseigneur," said he, "are you content?"

"You should not put that question to me, Barjac, but to your master."

With a meaning smile the two diplomatists parted.

"Really," said Richelieu in his carriage, "this one will pay me better, and I shall have much less bother.

"There is only one difficulty now," he mused; "the question of fact is settled, and the question of *persons* remains. Bachelier and I must have a talk about that."

III.

A PRIVATE TRANSACTION.

Now that we have followed Mademoiselle de Charolais and Madame de Prie to the Hôtel de Richelieu, and Monsieur de Richelieu himself to the queen's card-party and to Monsieur de Fréjus at Issy, it seems to me to be quite time to leave that moral and religious gentleman to lay his wires with Bachelier, the king's valet-de-chambre, and to return for a while to Madame de Mailly, whose acquaintance we made when we entered her boudoir with Bannière, and on whom we turned our backs again almost before she had opened her lips.

We have told the whole story of that marriage which had been followed in due time by Monsieur de Mailly's journey to Lyons.

We have tried to draw Madame de Mailly's portrait,—a portrait which has been handed down to us in all its details by the *chronique scandaleuse* of the time.

We have seen that her hair was brown, and her complexion fair, that her teeth were dazzlingly white, and her eyes shaded by thick black eyebrows. We have told of the incomparable charm of her personality, but we forgot to speak of her foot, which was the prettiest, neatest little foot at court, or of her perfect taste in dress, in which she so excelled other women that all Europe took the fashion from her for a period of ten years.

At the risk of repeating what we have said before, we say that she was clever, unselfish, and kind-hearted, that

she belonged to the very highest social caste, and that she knew all the ways of the court and all the workings of the human heart. That is to say, Mademoiselle de Nesle estimated the man whom she had espoused at his true value, good qualities and faults.

She knew perfectly well that his affection for her had no other basis than selfishness and convenience; but she hoped, trusting in her merit and knowing her own worth, to change his sentiment, or lack of sentiment, into veritable love.

Some women have the virtue of patience, and they are the wiser; they know that their happiness is only a question of time, and that sooner or later they will meet with due appreciation.

Unhappily for Madame de Mailly, the count was living at a period when a man of spirit needed a mistress of agreeable qualities rather than a wife of the greatest intrinsic worth. His own spouse appeared to him melancholy, thoughtful, and sensitive. Moreover, she was very self-contained, a great stickler for ceremony, and had but little property. Thus he had no reason for conciliating his wife's family, and little reason to keep terms with her.

Once married, he noticed one thing which he had never suspected; it was that he must needs play the adoring husband instead of allowing himself to be adored by her. Many men are at the feet of their mistresses, although they demand that their wives should kneel before them. Mailly was much bored to find that he had to pay court in his own house as he did at Versailles.

He sighed for the ups and downs, the extravagance and the mystery of a bachelor's life; he soon wearied of all that his wife chose to show him of her heart or her intellect. He cut the leaves and thought he had read

the book; but it remained completely closed to him, he had scarcely mastered the preface.

At that point ennui claimed him for its own; and when ennui lays hold of a newly married man, its grasp is not easily broken. It clung fast to him, and he took to absenting himself from home more and more as an antidote; his absences gradually became of longer duration as well as more frequent. Finally, one morning he took a very decided course, as we have narrated. He entered a post-chaise, and went off in search of Olympe, whom he had loved to distraction ever since he had given her up.

We know the rest.

But there are some things which we do not yet know, — the silent grief of the countess, for example; the profound disgust with which she viewed the life to which this marriage had condemned her; and, when this disgust had taken possession of her, the utter indifference which she displayed in dealing with that divinity to which those who sacrifice most to it are perhaps the least devoted, and which is called public opinion.

Madame de Mailly was young, without being too young; she was fascinating rather than beautiful; she knew enough not to be bored when she really wanted to be entertained, and had sufficient strength of mind to live independently; she was prudent enough in her expenditures not to be compelled, thanks to the means which might have seemed so meagre to another, to appeal to her family or her husband.

Mailly had gone away without bidding her adieu; he had returned without advising her of the fact; a whole month had passed since he had been seen at the hotel.

These facts were sufficient to arouse the interest at least, if not the jealousy, of a young wife.

Madame de Mailly desired to know what her husband was doing, and she found out. The knowledge served to increase her contempt, her indifference, and her longing for liberty.

Matters had reached this point when Bannière's famous visit took place, when Madame de Mailly would have learned the whole truth, had she not already known it.

During the evening of that day, as well as the whole of the next day and the day following that, Madame de Mailly, who had already pondered deeply upon her position, pondered even more deeply. The result of her deliberations was a well-considered determination to put an end to a condition of things which many women, women of spirit too, would have accepted, nay more, would have striven to bring about.

But Madame de Mailly had something better than high spirit; it would be better to say that she had that and something besides. She had a sensitive heart, and with that encumbrance it was difficult for her to submit for long to such a situation.

She reflected that Monsieur de Mailly would return to his home some day or other, and she waited for him to return, as indeed he did, at last. He came to see a fine horse which had been in the stables for three days awaiting his inspection.

The count went at once to the stables, had the horse taken out and put through his paces, examined him, was content with him, and purchased him.

Having made this acquisition, he started for the gate with the evident intention of going away again.

He was already passing through, when he heard little steps hurrying along behind him as if trying to overtake him.

He turned about, and found that they were the little

steps of his wife's maid, whom we have seen treat the dragoon so cordially.

She came from the countess to beg Monsieur de Mailly not to leave the hotel without calling upon her.

Although such an invitation seemed strange to the count, he made no demur about complying with it at once: he was a man who knew how to take life easily, like Monsieur de Grammont, to whom Hamilton remarked with breathless excitement: "Monsieur le Comte, I think that you forgot something at London." "True, Monsieur, I forgot to marry your sister, and I am going back expressly to remedy the omission," he replied. So Monsieur de Mailly replied to the soubrette:

"Say to Madame la Comtesse that I was just about to ask the favor which she is kind enough to grant."

And he followed her.

She had hardly repeated this reply to her mistress, when Monsieur de Mailly, who was directly behind her, appeared upon the threshold.

"Good morning, Madame," said he, approaching the countess, and kissing her hand with perfect freedom from embarrassment.

"Good morning, Monsieur," replied the countess, with a gravity of demeanor which the count took for the sulks.

Then he looked around and saw that the maid, in obedience to a sign from her mistress, had left them alone.

"You sent for me, Madame?" said he.

"Yes, Monsieur; I begged you to be kind enough to do me the favor to come to my apartments."

"I am here and at your service, Madame."

"Oh, never fear, Monsieur; I will not take much of your time."

"Aha," thought Mailly; "she is going to ask me for money."

As that was the thing which it cost him the least to give, he assumed a most gracious expression.

The countess did not unbend in the slightest degree.

"Monsieur," said she, after a moment's pause, fixing a determined gaze upon the count, "it's something more than a month since I saw you last."

"Indeed! do you think it's as long as that, Madame?" exclaimed Mailly, as if astounded.

"I am sure of it, Monsieur."

"Then I beg a thousand million pardons, Madame, for my long absence; but really you have no conception how an officer's time is taken up by these interminable provincial inspections."

"I know it, and do not undertake to reproach you. God forbid!"

The count bowed as if content with the assurance.

"But," continued Madame de Mailly, "the fact remains that you have stayed away from the house, as I said, a little more than a month."

"And I," retorted Mailly, "had the honor to reply that the inspections —"

"Take up much of an officer's time; yes, Monsieur, I heard you perfectly; but that is an additional reason, you see, why I should inquire how much longer you propose to remain away from the hotel."

All this was said with the well-bred calmness which is found only in a certain class; and although Mailly certainly belonged to that class, it embarrassed him slightly to reply to that question.

"Why, Madame," said he, "that depends on circumstances; if I go away again, I think I may remain sometime away, provided of course that I do not remain here. But why do you ask that, pray?"

"Because I did not marry you to remain alone all

the time, and because solitude wearies me," replied the young countess, concisely.

"Ah, Madame, if the discussion is to turn upon that point," rejoined De Mailly, "permit me to say that I cannot undertake to amuse you and do my duty as a military officer at the same time."

The discussion was becoming serious, and the count, as may be seen, was preparing to make harsh retorts to the harsh expression which began to gleam in his young wife's eyes.

"It seems to me, Monsieur," the countess replied, "that our marriage contract did not provide that you should marry me for the purpose of serving the king."

"I married you, Madame," was De Mailly's reply, "in order to maintain my hold upon and magnify the post which I have at court; if there is any profit in it, as we are equally interested, you will receive your moiety of the profits."

"I don't know whether there may be profit for me in the future, Monsieur, but what I do know is that there is ennui in the past; I don't know whether there is present advancement for you, but there surely is amusement."

"Amusement! How so? What do you mean, Madame?" demanded the count, amazed at her calm and determined tone.

"You were at the Comédie day before yesterday," the countess replied; "you were amused then, or at least you seemed to be very much so."

"At the Comédie, Madame, it is very possible; at the Comédie, you know, people do exhibit that appearance of amusement."

"I can well believe, Monsieur, that you were there on the king's service; but at all events you were not with me."

"Upon my word, Madame, one would say that you were doing me the honor of trying to quarrel with me."

"And one would not go astray, Monsieur le Comte! I am, indeed, trying to quarrel with you," said the young woman, placidly and with perfect self-possession.

"Oh, I hope, Countess, that you will not expose us both to the ridicule which jealousy on your part would excite."

"There 's nothing ridiculous about it, Count, and this is how I argue: you married me, and I am yours; you ought therefore, in fair dealing, to be mine. I have n't you and you have me, — loss for me and gain for you."

"Explain yourself, Madame."

"That 's easily done. You have a mistress! I have no lover. You look out for your own amusement, while I am dying with ennui. To sum up, pleasure for Monsieur le Comte, desertion for Madame la Comtesse."

"I — I have a mistress!" cried Mailly, angry as men always are when they are in the wrong; "I, a mistress! I! The proof, Madame; I demand the proof!"

"Oh, nothing more simple, Monsieur. A man came here day before yesterday to weep, and to ask me for his mistress whom you had stolen from him."

"A man! what man?"

"How do I know! A soldier of your regiment."

"I have no idea what you mean, Countess," rejoined Mailly, blushing; "I am not in the habit of associating with vivandières."

"This is no vivandière, Monsieur," replied the countess, coolly; "it 's an actress."

"Some strolling player from the provinces!"

"No strolling player from the provinces either, but a very lovely and distinguished-looking young woman, who made her first appearance at the Comédie-Française

day before yesterday, and whose début was announced on the bills under the name of Mademoiselle Olympe."

"That's another good one!" sneered the count; "the Mailly dragoons have actresses of the Comédie-Française for mistresses! Nonsense! Fables!"

"*Dame!* you understand, Monsieur le Comte, that I have not worn myself out collecting gossip; the fact is proved to my satisfaction, and as there is no need that it should be proved to anybody else, why, that 's enough."

"Proved," cried the count,—"proved that I have a mistress?"

"Pray be sensible!" replied Madame de Mailly; "own up, Monsieur! You injure yourself to no possible purpose by denying it."

Mailly, whose self-esteem was deeply wounded, straightened up.

"Even if I had a mistress, Madame, and an actress at that, would that be any reason for a woman of spirit like you to make a scene from jealousy?"

"In the first place, Monsieur," the countess retorted, still with unruffled composure, "I am making no scene; I am not in the least jealous. I lose you — what would you have? I complain, and —"

"And?"

"And I make my own plans."

"Ah! you make your own plans?" said Mailly, sarcastically. "Come, what sort of plans have you made, if I may ask?"

"It is undeniable," said the countess, as if speaking to herself, "that men are selfish to the point of barbarism. Here you are scolding me and mocking me. And why? Because my vision is clear and just."

"The clearness of your vision has nothing to do with it," returned Mailly.

"Why is it then, pray?"

"It 's because it is the worst of form to set spies on one's husband."

"I have done absolutely nothing of the sort, Monsieur, and I flatter myself upon one thing, especially since the beginning of our conversation."

"What is that, may I ask?"

"That I know what is good form as well as you do. And since you have undertaken to give me a lesson, Monsieur le Comte, I venture to beg you to accept one."

"A lesson, — I?"

"Yes, Monsieur, why not?"

"I am ready for the lesson, Madame."

"I am young, and I have my good points; you don't see them, — so much the worse for both of us. But I will leave you to be a dupe by yourself; either take me back seriously and absolutely, or give me back my liberty."

"Do you mean this seriously?" exclaimed Mailly, exasperated by the imperturbable coolness and logical reasoning of the countess.

"You cannot doubt it, Monsieur, from my manner of speaking."

"What! you propose a rupture?"

"Frankly, yes."

"To me, — to your husband!"

"To be sure. I would not propose it to my husband, if my husband loved me."

"Forgive me, Madame; you are young and inexperienced, although you have developed extraordinary decision of character. I cannot then, knowing life as I do, allow you to take such a suicidal step."

"I do not understand you, Monsieur. In what way would it be suicidal?"

"The free man, Madame, enjoys, by virtue of his freedom, all the pleasures of life."

"And the woman, too, Monsieur."

"And it is for that reason that you desire to be free?"

"Precisely."

"I admire you."

"And do you accept?"

"Why —"

"Why, what?"

"Have you made any preparations?"

"For what?"

"To fill your husband's place?"

"You give me no account of your actions, Monsieur; permit me to take the same course."

"And yet, Madame —"

"However, Monsieur, I don't see why we should prolong the discussion on that point. Do you wish me to explain?"

"I should be much pleased, I confess."

"Very well; you know, Monsieur, that thus far I have done absolutely nothing toward filling your place. If I had taken any steps, you understand, my demand would be for separation alone, or else I would demand nothing at all, whereas I now ask with equal eagerness for separation or reunion, as you choose."

Mailly began to reflect.

The countess gazed inquiringly at him.

"Upon my word, that 's the male species all over!" said she: "recoiling always before what is certain, they accuse women of being capricious, and are themselves a thousand times more so than women, or than the clouds, or the waves of the sea!"

"Listen, Madame! this is a serious matter."

"What is a serious matter?"

"This that you propose to me."

"In what particular, I pray to know? Are we not already completely asunder? Is it not a month and some days, if my reckoning is right, since I saw you? Let us say that it is only a month. One month out of twelve since our marriage. Tell me, what will you lose by being separated outright? Nothing. While I, on the other hand, shall gain a great deal. Do this for me, Monsieur, and it will be a kindness which I will not forget."

"I should be curious to know, Madame, what you will gain by this separation; tell me, I beg you, like a good creature."

"I shall gain in this, Monsieur, that I shall not be always waiting for the day or the night, as I have done for a year. I shall gain in not tiring myself by making toilettes for a husband who never sees them. I shall gain in being esteemed by you, as a man esteems every object the possession of which is contested for by another. In short, I shall regain my true value, which my lord and master does not know, blinded as he is by the mere fact of proprietorship."

"But which others, not so blind, do know, I take it?"

"No, Monsieur, not yet."

"But they will know in time?"

"Oh, it may be so."

"Madame!"

"But I venture to ask you this," retorted the countess, proudly: "suppose it should be so, by what right, pray, would you cast it in my teeth?"

"Madame, I do not say that, and I have no reproaches to offer; God forbid! I simply repeat that your firm bearing, after a year of married life, fills me with admiration; indeed I did not know you, and now that I do know you —"

"Well, what then?"

"I confess that you frighten me."

"Very good!" said the countess; "I prefer that rather than to have you pity me, — still another reason for you to accept, if I frighten you."

"Be good enough to formulate your proposition, Countess," said Mailly, driven to desperation by this unpleasant persistence.

"Here it is, Monsieur."

"I am listening," said the count, with his mind made up to try to inspire terror in his turn, by an appearance of stern determination.

"It is very simple, Monsieur: we will separate as friends, without scandal, without apparent rupture, — you to have entire liberty to do as you please, and I to enjoy the same prerogative. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, Madame, but whither does it lead?"

"The result will be for you, that you will never have to hear again what you are hearing to-day, for I will never say another word to you about it, if you consent to what I ask. That in itself is something; so it seems to me. Does n't it seem so to you?"

"What notary will draw up the contract?" asked the count, ironically.

"It is all drawn up, Monsieur, and we have no need of a notary for that," rejoined the countess calmly, drawing a folded paper from her bosom. "I have myself prepared, rough-drafted, and copied, as they say, the little contract for our mutual happiness."

"Under what guaranty?" the count sneeringly inquired.

"Under the guaranty of your word as a gentleman, Monsieur, and mine as a woman nobly born."

"Read on, notary," said the count, jokingly.

Madame de Mailly read: —

"Between the undersigned:

"Louis Alexandre, Comte de Mailly, and Louise-Julie de Nesle, Comtesse de Mailly,

"The following agreement has been entered into:"

"And you drew that up all alone, Madame?" exclaimed the count.

"All alone, Monsieur."

"It 's marvellous!"

"I resume," said the countess; and she resumed: —

"The Comte, with the consent of the Comtesse, resumes his absolute and entire freedom of action, confiscated by the marriage.

"The Comtesse, in like manner, with her husband's consent, resumes her entire freedom of action.

"In virtue whereof, both bind themselves upon their honor to offer no obstacle or hindrance of any sort to the execution of this contract, entered into on both sides under the sanction of their respective promises.

"Done in duplicate at Paris, Hôtel de Nesle, this — "

"You have left the date blank, Madame?" asked the count.

"*Dame!* you understand, Monsieur, that I did so because I had no idea when I should have the honor of seeing you."

"And there is no need to antedate the contract, Countess?"

"On your part, perhaps, Monsieur, not on mine."

"Then we will sign — "

"Under date of to-day, if you please."

"Very well."

"You will sign, then?"

"Madame," said the count, "I have reflected that

with such a disposition as yours you would make me very unhappy. I am not the man to enjoy a continual struggle in my household; you would vanquish me. I prefer to surrender with the honors of war."

"I have done well, Count, in that case?"

"You have indeed, Madame; and if I sign —"

"If you sign —"

"It will be from selfish motives."

"As in love; selfishness for two," said the countess, sweetly.

The shaft buried itself in the count's self-esteem, and inflicted a deep wound.

He seized the pen which the countess held out to him, and wrote his signature hastily at the foot of the instrument.

"It is your turn, Madame," said he.

The countess pointed out to him that she had signed in advance; and he blushed.

The contract was drawn in duplicate. The countess handed him one copy, and retained the other. Then she offered him her hand.

For a moment the count was tempted to refuse to take it, and to leave the room in a rage.

But pride came to his aid; he stopped, took the countess's hand, and deposited a most gracious kiss upon it.

"Well, Madame," said he, "now you are satisfied, I trust."

"As you will be to-morrow, Monsieur le Comte."

"Do not abuse your freedom, I implore you."

"Count, no conditions outside of the bargain as signed; full and entire freedom of action."

"Full and entire freedom, so be it."

The count bowed low in recognition of his wife's courtesy, and went out without turning again.

The countess pressed to her heart the sheet which gave her her freedom.

Then she rang for her maid, and made her toilette.

She supped that evening at Rambouillet, with Monsieur le Comte de Toulouse, who was giving theatricals for the king.

IV.

RAMBOUILLET.

RAMBOUILLET, a magnificent abode, embellished by all that art and wealth could procure, belonged to Monsieur le Comte de Toulouse, one of the legitimized sons of the late King Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan.

No court could be at once more refined and more brilliant.

The Comtesse de Toulouse wielded the sceptre there, with that gracious majesty of which the tradition was already beginning to fade away.

The young King Louis XV. went there to breathe the fresh air, and enjoy the untrammelled liberty of the place, for they treated him there like a spoiled child. There again he could breathe the noble memories of royalty, which were perpetuated at Rambouillet, like the dregs of the generous wines of which Horace tells us, whose intoxicating odor was preserved even in the empty amphora.

The Comtesse de Toulouse had been beloved by Louis XV. Beautiful and coquettish, albeit perfectly sincere, for she loved her husband, she had won the heart of the king. Under her tuition the young prince had studied and learned the courteous demeanor which he succeeded in maintaining exteriorly, to his court at least, up to the very last moments of a life wasted by vulgar debauchery, but which, though gangrenous at the core, remained polished on the surface.

The useful training in refinement of bearing and manners which women impart has an influence which never ceases to act upon the mind and morals. The maladies which attack a constitution thus strengthened, may doubtless change the character for the worse, but can never destroy it.

Louis XV., young though he was, and completely under the influence of Cardinal de Fleury, understood that a love affair with the Comtesse de Toulouse would cause great scandal with no compensating pleasure. So he soon abandoned the thought of that poetic creature in any other capacity than as one for whom he always retained profound respect and esteem, and a sentiment which was something more than friendship but was not love.

It is true that love, notwithstanding his bandage, had flown away very slowly, and with his head turned back, and that he was ready to return at the first sign.

We have said that Louis was in the habit of going frequently to this beautiful château of Rambouillet. He hunted there, drove and walked, and amused himself with the ladies.

The society which he found there retained none of the peculiar flavor of the regency.

Living in comparative retirement on their own estates, with none of the frantic and noisy rage exhibited by Madame la Duchesse du Maine at Sceaux, the Grand Admiral of France and Madame la Comtesse de Toulouse were completely engrossed by the king, sacrificing their former fancies of the rights of the legitimized progeny to the living reality of the great principle of legitimate descent.

Thus politics was absolutely tabooed. At Rambouillet they talked of literature and sacrificed to the arts, as

they used to say at that time. They loved and sang the praises of beauty, wit, intellect, and warlike prowess. It was the court of the true descendant of Louis XIV. On the façade of the château might well have been graven the device of the great king, *Nec pluribus impar*. Nothing was lacking except the Jesuits and heart-blasting ambition, and it was a fortunate lack.

Thus the young king, upon arriving at Rambouillet, felt that everything which might annoy him was kept carefully out of sight, that the flowers exhaled a sweeter perfume for him, that he was in the bosom of his real family, and that side by side with the affection due to blood-relationship dwelt the respect which illegitimacy always feels for the prince whose right is incontestable.

Louis XV. brought to Rambouillet all the wild tendencies of his youth, all the ardor of his temperament, and his whole heart, if indeed he had such an organ.

On this particular occasion his Majesty had been specially bidden and was expected at Rambouillet. The Comte de Toulouse had assembled the best of company to do honor to the *fleur-de-lis*.

They were to try to amuse the king, who for several days past had given symptoms of incomprehensible melancholy, and whom the crotchety, ill-conditioned spirits at court were outspoken in declaring to be beyond the possibility of being amused.

Some attributed this melancholy to his recent illness, while others sought unknown causes for his extraordinary depression. The leading courtiers alone knew the real causes, and they did not know how to put an end to it.

The road to Rambouillet was thronged all day with carriages emblazoned with coats-of-arms, all tightly closed because of the cold, which began to be very sharp;

horsemen bearing orders, or rare and unseasonable delicacies, purchased at Paris, the home of early fruits; or musicians in hired cabs, making the trip in high spirits, like true artists, and hoping to requite themselves for the slender repasts and the fatigues of the journey with the royal hospitality of the château of Rambouillet.

The plan was for the king to hunt in the forest during the day, and to return at six o'clock to supper at the château; then there was to be a play, — a short one, however, — so that the ladies might have some opportunity to talk or play cards before retiring.

As may be seen, the programme met every requirement of pleasure and fitness.

The king arrived at eleven o'clock in the morning, having himself chosen the hour of departure from Versailles. The princes, two ambassadors, and his intimate friends were present at the ceremony of removing his boots.

Louis, so we are informed by Sergens, hunted all day long without apparent interest. He ate scarcely anything when the halt was made for lunch, and allowed the stag to be killed without showing any desire to be in at the death. At just five o'clock he returned to the château.

Rumors as to the events of the day were already circulating among the courtiers. They knew of the king's lack of interest, and the royal absent-mindedness had caused an air of gloom to settle down upon the apartments of the Comtesse de Toulouse.

Every one sought to model his expression upon that of the young master, — like the courtiers and familiars of Alexander the Great, who carried their heads on one side in imitation of him.

When the king walked through the gallery on his way to the salon, it was observed that his beautiful bright

eyes were bent upon the men rather than upon the ladies. He seemed to be looking for somebody who was not there.

At the table he sighed several times.

The Comtesse de Toulouse was seated beside the king at table; she enjoyed the privileges of an elder sister.

His excessive melancholy, which neither the journey down, nor the chase, nor the different diversions which had been resorted to in the hope of amusing him, had availed to overcome, — his evident internal suffering, disquieted the countess.

Availing herself of her privilege as a relative and dear friend, Madame de Toulouse leaned over to her royal guest.

"Sire," she said.

Louis seemed to emerge from a profound reverie at the word. He looked at her.

"Sire," she said, "your Majesty is bored at Rambouillet?"

"Madame, I am a little bored everywhere except here, I assure you."

"Did your Majesty have poor sport in the forest?"

"I don't even know whether I was in the forest," said the king.

These words were overheard, and aroused a lively sense of alarm among those present. This king, who was so pale, and ate so little, and was so absent-minded as all that, must surely still be ill.

To what could his condition of health be ascribed, now that the regent was dead? During his lifetime they could always fall back on calumny, and that was a comfort.

The king must not be questioned. Madame de Toulouse was on thorns, waiting for him to speak.

He did not speak, however.

After the banquet he passed into the theatre, where a little opera was performed.

As he took his place in an easy-chair, Monsieur de Richelieu appeared.

On the instant the king's brow cleared; his glance was riveted upon the duke, and he made a little friendly sign which summoned him to his side.

We may imagine how speedily this sign was responded to by the noble courtier, who, to tell the truth, rather expected it.

The opera began.

Nothing could be more bewitching than the little hall under those conditions.

A hundred or more young ladies of glorious beauty and illustrious rank; a hundred men glittering with orders and decorations; war, politics, finance, from ministers to intendants; cardinals, archbishops, and bishops, — such were the embellishments of that apartment.

Richelieu was in an ecstasy of enthusiasm; the king began to listen to the music.

"Now we will see," said the duke to himself, "which one of these hundred women whom I hold in my hand the king will look at."

He began to watch the king and the women alternately.

Suddenly the king leaned toward Pecquigny.

"Duke," said he, "when one plays certain rôles, can one play certain others also?"

"Yes, Sire, certainly," replied the Captain of the Guards, without understanding the drift of the question; "certain others, and still others."

It was essential always to make some reply to the king when he asked a question, even though the reply should be a horrible exaggeration or a downright lie. Louis,

since his childhood, had had the habit of asking questions and never waiting for the answer.

Thus it mattered little what the answer was, provided there was one.

This time, contrary to his custom, he waited.

Pecquigny was astounded, and feared he had made a fool of himself.

"Ah! so," said the king; "and then, when one acts a speaking part, one may sing also?"

"Yes, Sire," replied Pecquigny.

This time the reply was guided by the tone of the question.

Monsieur de Richelieu listened attentively to questions and replies.

"Why in the deuce did he ask Pecquigny that?" he asked himself in some perplexity.

It will be remembered that Richelieu arrived from Vienna on the very evening that Olympe made her début at the Comédie-Française, and was, therefore, not present thereat, and did not know the consequences of that début to which the king alluded. Pecquigny, after the two questions which had been put to him, was equally at a loss to fathom the king's meaning.

"We must wait until he explains himself," thought the Captain of the Guards.

The first and second acts came to an end.

"Who sings in this opera?" asked Louis.

The names of the performers were repeated to him.

"What!" said he, "are those all? no other actors or actresses?"

A ray of light entered the brain of the Captain of the Guards.

"Aha!" he said, "good! I see now."

"Would your Majesty have liked something different?" said Richelieu.

The king made no reply.

Pecquigny broke the silence.

"I will wager," said he, "that your Majesty was expecting to see other faces on that stage."

"I? Why do you say that to me, Duke?" said Louis.

"Because your Majesty does n't seem to enjoy the opera particularly."

"I detest music," was the king's reply.

Then, after a moment's silence, he asked, blushing deeply, —

"Does that girl sing whom we heard the other day?"

It was very clear that the king had needed to make a mighty effort to reach the point of making that inquiry.

"What girl?" asked Richelieu, quickly picking up the question.

"Mademoiselle Olympe, an actress," replied Pecquigny. "No, Sire."

"Who is this Olympe?" the duke's eyes inquired of Pecquigny.

"A perfect marvel of beauty, my dear fellow," replied the Captain of the Guards.

"A girl whom I saw in 'Britannicus' the other day," added the king. "A fine actress."

"Aha! so he has noticed somebody!" thought Richelieu; "it 's a good thing to be warned."

"He must be in love," said Pecquigny to himself; "it 's a good thing that he has betrayed himself. I will remember that."

The king took no further interest in the performance; he talked with Madame de Toulouse until the curtain fell, and never once applauded.

"He is bored to death, and no mistake," Richelieu

reflected. "What a pity not to have at hand the remedy he longs for!"

Drawing his tablets he wrote, without allowing anyone to suspect what he was doing, —

"Mademoiselle Olympe of the Comédie-Française."

Then he ran his eyes slowly along the dazzling circle of lovely women, upon whom, notwithstanding their superb toilets and their personal charms, the king's eyes had not once rested.

"It's an extraordinary thing!" he muttered; "why, at his age, I would have loved every one of those women."

When his reflections had reached that point, he was conscious of a luminous something which exerted a powerful attraction upon him, and drew his eyes to the king's left. He saw there, at the end of the row of ladies, a face, pale with all its rouge, with a crown of lovely hair, and two great black eyes, dilated in a feverish gaze.

Those eyes seemed to be turned incessantly, fanatically, so to speak, in his direction. Richelieu was a handsome fellow, and much sought after; many a time he had surprised these mute but none the less expressive challenges, sometimes offered openly and sometimes delivered from behind a fan.

He had no doubt therefore that these glances were meant for him; and he proceeded to examine the owner of the eyes with more attention.

The face, of a strange type of beauty, largely due to its expression, affected Richelieu strongly, and gave him, on the instant, the wish to know more of the woman whose eyes he had thus attracted.

But she was quite unknown to him; in two years and more of absence from the court, the hunter had lost many tracks.

He went up to Pecquigny, and, while the king was trying to persuade Madame de Toulouse, who was in despair, that he was enjoying himself extremely, —

"Duke," said he.

"What?" said Pecquigny, coming out of his musing-fit with a bound.

Richelieu looked at him in wonder. Musing was not one of Pecquigny's habits.

"Duke," he continued, "who is that dark woman?"

"Where is she? there are many dark women here. The king does n't like them."

Pecquigny was replying to his own thought, and not to Richelieu.

Richelieu smiled.

"I 'm not talking about the king," said he; "I asked you the name of that dark woman there at the left, at the end of the gallery and next to the stage, with a silver-gray dress, few diamonds, and much style."

"Oh!" said the Captain of the Guards, "that 's nobody."

"What! nobody?"

"No, it 's De Mailly's wife."

"Bah! one of the De Nesles?"

"Yes, my boy; and there are four more just like her. Do you know anybody who wants to invest?"

"Do you see how she stares at me?"

"At you?"

"Just look!"

"By Jove! that 's so;" and Pecquigny leaned forward to see better. "Are you taken with her?"

"I have always liked women whom everybody else likes or who like everybody."

"You like them all, then?"

"That 's about so."

"Look out, the king is listening!"

In fact, while lending one ear to the Comtesse de Toulouse, the young king had opened the other to the conversation of the two courtiers; and our respect for truth compels us to say that the ear which was opened the wider was not that devoted to listening to Madame de Toulouse.

The conversation was rather light in tone; and the king, being, as we have said, a novice in the art of love, was deeply interested in it.

The dukes paused in their conversation.

"What was that you said, Monsieur de Richelieu?" the king inquired.

"I, Sire?"

"Yes, something about women whom everybody likes or who like everybody."

"Your Majesty has very sharp ears."

"That is not an answer to my question, Duke."

"Pecquigny, Sire, who deserves hanging for it, was slandering the fair sex to me."

"And you?"

"Oh! I? Faith, I was letting him go on."

The play came to an end; the king rose and offered his arm to Madame de Toulouse. He would have preferred to remain where he was, and continue the conversation.

He went into the ball-room, however, and danced a minuet with Madame de Toulouse.

Richelieu seized the opportunity to approach Madame de Mailly, and see what would become of the eyes which had been so persistently fixed upon him.

To his unbounded astonishment he saw that the direction of their gaze did not change as he changed his position; instead of being fixed upon him, they were fixed upon the king.

It was the king at whom the young woman was and had been staring so intently.

Richelieu, who saw a thousand interesting possibilities in that discovery, was careful not to disturb her. He was almost as well content to have Madame de Mailly look thus at the king as at himself.

He took up his position behind a large chair, and took his turn at gazing fixedly at the fair student of royalty.

He saw her swallow deep draughts of that amorous poison which goes from the eyes to the heart. He saw her turn her head as often as Louis turned his, and frown darkly whenever Madame de Toulouse smiled at any remark of the king.

Madame de Mailly was jealous, as well as in love.

Alone and unobserved amid the throng, unnoticed because it was her object to see rather than to be seen, she had no suspicion that within ten feet of her a piercing eye was reading her every thought at the bottom of her soul.

She thought with every muscle of her face, poor girl! as she felt with every fibre of her heart.

What were the thoughts with which the countess's brain was busy? Is it hard to tell and to prove that we are right?

No. Since Monsieur de Richelieu could read them upon her features, we will do the same for ourselves. Free as air, drawing her breath with a sense of keen delight, feeling herself bound by no earthly bond, she was tasting the bliss of filling her whole being with novel sensations, and was eagerly absorbing new impressions with a mind which nothing hitherto had been able to satisfy.

For the first time since her childhood, she was living

in a world of fancy. Set free by her husband, she had the supreme happiness, unknown to all faint-hearted persons or those made of common clay, of refusing herself a pleasure at the very moment when she had accorded it to herself. She had cast her eager gaze into the assemblage, to select there at her leisure an ideal being whom she could love; for her heart was overflowing with love, and no one in the world made even a pretence of loving her.

"All these men here," she was saying to herself, "are mine. Insolent princes! scornful Alcibiades, who will not so much as cast a disdainful eye upon the poor deserted girl! — you are mine, and I may love you if I choose. In my heart of hearts I can mould you according to my desires. I can pursue you with my wishes and my hopes. Possession will never cost my pride less, or bring me more solid enjoyment.

"What do I say? Illustrious nobles and princes? Why, I may love the king, if I please. The king is the fairest and proudest and most adorable of all the great men at court; very well! there is nothing to prevent my appropriating him to myself.

"Nor is there anything to prevent my saying to him, as I say to myself, that his eyes have the brilliancy of diamonds and the languorous expression of love; that his features are noble and his figure charming; that he cannot make a movement or take a step without spreading pleasure around him.

"Who then can prevent my loving the king? I have the right to do it, all signed in my desk. It cost me more than I shall get for it."

Richelieu, notwithstanding his skill in reading female faces, had not divined such thoughts as these; especially

had he not divined that the Comtesse de Mailly, floating on a sea of fascinating illusions, was really very far astray in her reckoning, and that her rupture with Monsieur de Mailly had been placed at a very high rate of interest.

V.

MUST IT BE?

After the minuet which Louis walked through,— outwardly smiling, it is true, but very evidently without the least thought of the dance or his partner,— he returned to Pecquigny, who was wandering about in perplexity as complete as Richelieu's after his discovery.

As he saw the king coming toward him, he stopped.

"Pecquigny!" said Louis.

"Sire!"

They stood looking at each other,— the king at Pecquigny, Pecquigny at the king.

For a moment neither spoke.

The king evidently would have been glad that Pecquigny should guess what he had to say to him, but he did not; so the king was compelled to speak for himself.

"Pecquigny," he said at last, "what did you say was the name of the girl who played 'Junie'?"

"What an infernal fool I am!" muttered Pecquigny to himself. He added aloud with his most charming smile,—

"Olympe, Sire."

"Oh, yes; I can't seem to remember the devilish name."

"There's no doubt about it," thought Pecquigny; "he's over head and ears in love."

He expected further questions, but the king asked no more.

Pecquigny, seeing that Louis seemed to have nothing more to say, resumed his conversation with himself at the point where he had dropped it; but he addressed himself with more respect, and employed the conditional mood.

"Pecquigny, my boy," said he, "if you are not an unmitigated ass, within three days you will have rendered a great service to your master."

As the king, either not wishing or not daring to say more, moved away from him, he continued his promenade.

"Yes," said he, pursuing his monologue, "I must do it; but Olympe is the object of Mailly's adoration, and if I march against that fortress, the Mailly battery will be trained upon me. What shall I do? Send a herald to Mailly to declare war upon him? What better herald could I find than myself? Since the king is in love, really in love, there can be no hesitation, and Mailly must be led to the sacrifice. I must be about it."

He raised his head and met Richelieu's look, still on the watch.

"Aha! the duke doubtless suspects something," he thought; "he is as sly as Satan; he means to outstrip me."

He approached the king, who awaited his coming with much interest. He thought, no doubt, that Pecquigny was going to speak to him of Olympe, but he was mistaken.

"Sire," said he, "what are your Majesty's orders for the night?"

"Orders! What orders?"

"Why, for the guard, Sire."

"Send away my light horse, and keep only the Swiss here."

Such was the king's custom at Rambouillet, as Pecquigny knew perfectly well.

"Ah! the Swiss?" said he. "Your Majesty retains the Swiss?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I am not very well, Sire."

"You?"

"Yes, Sire."

"I think you are somewhat flushed." Pecquigny bowed.

"One moment, Duke; it is n't the small-pox that you have, is it?"

And the king, who was always in dread of the small-pox, fell back a step or two.

"No, Sire," replied Pecquigny, "I 've had it."

The king came close to him again.

"And you were saying —"

"I was about to say, Sire, that if your Majesty did not keep the household troops here, I would beg your Majesty to give me leave of absence, and put up with the lieutenant of the Swiss for this one night."

"Very well, Duke," said the king, with a smile; "go."

"How kind you are, Sire! many thanks. The king will find me a better servant to-morrow than I have been this evening, I am sure."

"Oh, I trust you for that!" said the king. "Go, my dear Duke, go."

Pecquigny bowed.

"Take care of yourself, Duke," cried the king; "I don't want you to be ill."

"Oh, the king is too kind!" said Pecquigny, with beaming face.

He called for his people, jumped into his carriage, and gave orders to be driven to Paris.

The king followed him to the door with his eyes, as one follows a gleam of hope.

When the Captain of the Guards had disappeared, he resumed his walk about the salon.

It was very cold outside, and the frost had drawn a thousand fantastic silvery designs upon the window-panes.

Madame de Toulouse, like a good hostess, did not lose sight of the king; she saw his embarrassment and his deathly ennui.

She came to his side, and said,—

"Sire, I have an idea."

"Oh, have you, Countess?" he cried; "it should be a brilliant idea, coming from you."

"I think it is. Listen, Sire!"

"I am listening with all my ears."

"In the first place, take my hand."

"Oh, that I will do most willingly!"

"And try to speak so that no one can hear us."

"Oho, Countess, I like the beginning immensely!"

"It 's a mystery."

"A mystery to be shared with you, Countess; oh, as many as you please! Come, what are you going to tell me?"

"Something which I have already told you, Sire."

"You could not repeat yourself too often, Countess, especially for me, who am never weary of listening to you."

"Sire, you are bored to distraction."

"Alas, Countess," said the king, bestowing upon her such a glance as Cherubino was to bestow upon Almaviva's wife sixty years later, "whose fault is it?"

A reproachful glance it was, and almost mournful,— a glance which from the eyes of Louis XIV. would have been the ruin of La Vallière.

Madame de Toulouse simply smiled; she knew those looks of old.

"To amuse one's guests is a bounden duty," she said gayly; "to amuse one's king is an honor."

"Very well!" said Louis. "I put myself in your hands, Countess; for Heaven's sake, amuse me."

"Then you must do —"

"What?"

"What I tell you."

"Blindly."

"Well, then, go to bed, Sire."

The king looked at her.

"What do you see so intensely diverting in that, Countess?" he asked.

"Well, then, pretend to go to bed."

"And what then?"

"Why, then everybody will go away, or follow your example."

"Well?"

"Then a certain number of choice spirits will come to your apartment, and we will try to amuse ourselves."

"Oh, yes," said the king; "and we will put out the lights."

"What for?" asked Madame de Toulouse.

"Why, so that no one will know that we are all wide awake," replied the king, innocently.

"Oh, if that 's what you mean," said the countess, "I agree."

The king pressed her hand, as pleased as a child.

"One moment," said she; "we have not finished yet."

"What remains for us to do, pray?"

"We must prepare the list of those who are not to go to sleep."

"Oh, Countess, how can we make a list here before everybody?"

"Yes, they would guess what we are doing. You are quite right."

"How can we do it, then?"

"Oh, another idea!"

"Tell me."

"We will walk around among the different groups; your Majesty will give me your hand."

"Of course, Countess, of course!"

"I will stop your Majesty before all those whom I think likely to afford amusement; and if your Majesty agrees that they should remain, you have only to say 'Yes' to me at each halt."

"Good, very good; let us begin."

"All right; we will begin."

"But you will never be able to remember them all!"

"I not remember, Sire?" replied Madame de Toulouse, maliciously. "It 's easy to see that your Majesty's memory is not of the best, to say such a thing to me."

The king pressed her hand affectionately.

"But then, Sire," she added hurriedly, to change the subject, "I should be very badly off, you must agree, if I had not memory enough to retain seven or eight names."

"No more than that?" cried the king.

"Ah, Sire, if you invite more than that number you must be very careful, or there will be very little amusement."

"You are always right, Countess."

Like an impatient child, he dragged Madame de Toulouse off among her guests.

The very first person they encountered was Mademoiselle de Charolais.

The princess was laughing with all her heart, for a

great laugher was she. The motion of laughing shook her lovely white shoulders, and showed her teeth, which shone whiter still by contrast with her lips, which were moist and red like the coral as it comes from the sea.

Madame de Toulouse smiled as she looked at the king.

"If this person is not diverting," said she, "she is at least highly diverted."

"Yes," said the king.

"Registered," replied the countess.

They passed on and met Monsieur de Toulouse, who had no suspicion of the danger which threatened him.

The countess brought the king face to face with her husband with a most significant smile.

But the king said not a word.

The countess insisted.

"Indeed," exclaimed the king; "it was n't necessary to tell me to choose, Countess, if you propose to do the choosing yourself."

"Sire, if I insist upon making this particular selection, you can charge it to yourself."

"Why so?"

"It is entirely your fault."

"How?"

"Because you said something just now which is the cause of Monsieur de Toulouse's good fortune."

"Oho! what did I say, Countess, I pray to know? How quickly I will take it back!"

"You said that we would put out the lights."

"I certainly did say that."

"In the darkness I cannot dispense with my husband's presence."

"So, Countess, you mean to reproach me for not bringing the queen here. I am very sorry," he continued,

shaking his head; "we would have made a fine conjugal party, — a most amusing thing."

It was the first time that the king had joked upon that subject.

Madame de Toulouse looked at him in amazement, and shook her head in turn.

"No, Countess," continued the king, "we didn't arrange this well, you see. Those whom I should choose might not suit you, while those whom you would choose might not be to my taste. It is much better — "

"Speak, Sire!"

"Much better to let chance decide."

"But we can't make them draw lots for the privilege, Sire; too many would cry out against the result, and too few would be satisfied."

"You had your idea, Countess; now it's my turn to have one."

"I have no doubt that the king's idea will be a thousand times better than mine."

"Good or bad, I will tell you what it is. You will present to me the gentlemen and ladies whom we both select; I will put a question to them, and they will be admitted or left out according to their reply."

"Very good, admirable, Sire!"

"Very well, then, let us agree on the details. I will go up to each person in turn, and say, 'Faut-il?' (must it be?)"

"That is not compromising."

"No; but you will see, Countess, how many will say 'No,' — you will see."

"What answer must they make to be admitted?"

"'Yes.'"

"So that the one who says 'Yes' will be admitted?"

"Exactly."

"Take care, Sire, you are taking a great risk."

"Why so, Countess?"

"Because nobody will dare to say 'No' to your Majesty."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"Very well! you will see: I have a way."

"Oh, Sire, explain it to me, I beg."

"To those whom I wish to make say 'No,' I will put the question in a crabbed kind of way."

"Good!"

"While to those whom I want to say 'Yes,' on the other hand, I will say 'Faut-il?' with a seductive expression, that will surely take them in. Lastly, to those as to whom I am indifferent —"

"Sire, so far as your Majesty is concerned, it will be as if there were none of that class here."

"How so?"

"Because I will not stop your Majesty before any such."

Louis smiled.

"First of all," said the countess, "two parts must be assigned, without regard to the lot: one to me —"

"Agreed with all my heart."

"And the other —"

"And the other?"

"To Monsieur de Toulouse."

"Signed 'Louis,' Countess."

"But how about poor Mademoiselle de Charolais, who has already passed the ordeal once?"

"She must take her chances with the rest, Countess; now to work!"

"All ready."

The king and the countess thereupon approached Mademoiselle de Charolais.

VI.

THE MAGNETIC CURRENTS.

THE princess was talking with her mother and Monsieur le Duc de Bourbon, and was laughing incessantly as she talked.

The king stopped before her; it was the second time within ten minutes.

"Faut-il?" he asked with a strangely mysterious expression.

"No," replied the teasing princess without hesitation, thinking that she detected in the question a threat on the king's part.

The king began to laugh with cruel glee; the countess herself could not keep a sober face.

"What have I done, pray?" asked the princess, in surprise; "is it a wager?"

"Silence!" said the king, putting a finger to his lips; and he passed on, leaving her in dire perplexity.

"At least tell me if I have won?" cried Mademoiselle, running after Louis, who was already at some distance.

"That depends," he replied

The princess stopped; everybody had turned in her direction, and she set about describing the episode to the whole assemblage. In a moment every one knew all about it, and every one thought from the king's actions that Mademoiselle de Charolais had won a bet.

Thereupon, as she was the sister of the first minister, as she was powerful, and beautiful besides, every one

thought himself or herself wonderfully sharp in following her example, and replying "No" to the king's "Faut-il?"

The king roared with laughter, and everybody else laughed with him. He drew the countess along with him in his hilarity as well as in his course through the salon. The rage for saying "No" spread from one to another, and his Majesty received none but negative responses.

At last he came to Richelieu.

That most artful of courtiers, realizing that there must be something beneath all this mummery, ran away from the king and the countess in joke, and hid behind the chair on which Madame de Mailly was sitting.

Louis followed close upon his heels, but was compelled, in common courtesy, to stop before Madame de Mailly, who rose, in much trouble, as he approached.

Madame de Toulouse's hand stopped him so that he stood face to face with the countess. His first feeling was a sort of surprise, almost a shock.

Without warning he had come directly within the circuit of the electric current which had been directed upon him all the evening from the battery of those black eyes which formed Madame de Mailly's principal attraction.

He meant to say "Faut-il?" roughly, for the sensation which he experienced as he stood before her was not a pleasant one.

There is discomfort in anything that is too acute, even though it be pleasure.

But fascinated and subdued by the fire which shot from the countess's eyes, he involuntarily softened his gesture and his voice. His look changed from ardent to timid; his voice took on a tender, almost imploring intonation.

"Faut-il?" he asked in the tone in which he might have asked, "Do you love me?"

The Comtesse de Mailly, deeply impressed in her turn by the wave of sympathetic emotion which flowed out upon her from the king's whole being, turned pale, put her hand to her heart, and replied, —

"Yes."

And it seemed as if her reply had been, —

"Love me."

All this took place more quickly than light can travel.

After Madame de Mailly, there remained only the Duc de Richelieu to whom the king had not propounded his question.

Sheltered but not hidden behind the chair, he rose at the sound of this short but pointed dialogue.

He understood everything, from the tones of the two voices and the touching significance of the tell-tale pantomime.

"Yes," he said to the king even before the question was put to him. "Yes, Sire, yes, yes, yes!"

The courtier saw that the surest way to pay his court was to say just what Madame de Mailly had said.

"There," said the king, leading Madame de Toulouse to a seat; "what did I tell you? You see, Countess, that out of a hundred people, by the most provoking bad luck, we are reduced to five, three of whom did not even choose. What can we do with five people, I ask you? Nothing."

"With five," said Madame de Toulouse, "we can play at puss-in-the-corner or blindman's-buff."

"But then," said the king, "in the last game, we should be certain never to make a mistake. We know one another too well."

"Then you give it up, Sire?"

"Faith —"

The king was on the point of saying "Yes," when suddenly, turning about as if drawn by an invisible chain, he found the patient, persistent, unwearying gaze of Madame de Mailly fixed upon him.

"Faith! no, I don't give it up; the unforeseen is the best sport in the world."

"Very well! but we must enjoin upon Monsieur de Richelieu and Madame de Mailly to be very entertaining; otherwise your Majesty is likely to be even more bored in your own apartments than at the Opera."

"I bored!" he repeated. "Oh, no, I don't think I shall be bored."

And he continued to look in the direction in which his eyes were drawn by that fascinating gaze.

He said, after a moment's thought, —

"Tell Monsieur de Toulouse, Countess; tell that lady also. I —"

"You, Sire?"

"I have a word to say to Monsieur de Richelieu."

Richelieu was staring at the king as intently as Madame de Mailly, and hastened to him at his first gesture.

"I have won, Sire, have I not?" said he.

"Faith! yes."

"May I ask the king," Richelieu added, bowing, "what the stake was?"

"Duke, we are soon going to try to enjoy ourselves without witnesses."

"Where, Sire?"

"In my apartments. Knock at my door when everybody has gone to bed."

Richelieu almost blushed with delight.

As for Madame de Mailly, the color fled from her

cheeks, and she was near fainting, when the Comtesse de Toulouse announced the good news to her.

"I imagine," mused Richelieu, taking his leave like the others, but without being, as the others were, deceived by this pretended retirement, — "I imagine that the night which is just beginning will assist me much in solving my problem."

Instead of entering his carriage, he took shelter in a little cabinet where Madame de Toulouse had already hidden Madame de Mailly.

Richelieu had never in his life addressed a word to Mademoiselle de Nesle, nor had he ever taken particular notice of that lady before the evening the events of which we are relating.

"If I were the old Richelieu," said he to himself, "this young lady should ask the king to intercede with me for her to-morrow. But what an ass I am! It 's too late for me to enter the lists, and I have but one resource."

Having thus reflected, he at once and without preface accosted Madame de Mailly.

"Madame," said he, "never again perhaps shall I have an opportunity to say to you something which you will be very sorry to hear."

"What can it be, Monsieur le Duc?" asked the countess, somewhat uneasily.

"Madame, for two hours I have been looking at you."

"Well, Monsieur?"

"For one hour — "

Richelieu almost said, "I have been in love with you." But he controlled himself in time, and finished his sentence.

"For one hour I have been sure that you are in love."

"I!" cried the countess.

"Madly, Madame."

"And with whom, *mon Dieu?*" cried she, trying to hide her embarrassment with a laugh.

"Oh! Madame, that is a pleasure which I prefer to leave to you when you shall yourself tell him."

Madame de Mailly, half alarmed, half indignant, was about to insist upon an explanation, when the countess, entering suddenly with her husband, announced that the king wished to see his guests.

Madame de Mailly therefore had to bear with her anxiety as best she might.

All lights were out in the château. The carriages had taken back to Paris all those guests who had no apartments set aside for them, and the privileged ones were already in bed. Nothing could be heard in the freezing courtyard and under the porches but the closing of the last carriage-doors, and the measured steps of the Swiss Guards on their beats.

Madame de Toulouse guided the conspirators by a secret stairway to the entrance of his Majesty's suite.

Profound silence reigned in the château and its appurtenances, save for the occasional howling of a dog in the kennels, replying to the howls of some kennel-mate lost in the forest, the noise of gunstocks falling upon the flags, and the shrill whistling of a cold wind through the tree-tops.

At this moment the soft footfalls of Madame de Toulouse and Madame de Mailly were heard upon the carpet; and the king, in high glee over the frolic, came to meet them at the door of his salon.

The two ladies were followed by Monsieur le Comte de Toulouse and Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu.

The king laughingly told them that he had sent for two violins, and had ordered a lunch, which awaited

their attacks, upon red plates covered with superb napkins of Dutch flowered damask.

The king escorted the four elect into his salon, and ordered that all the doors should be closed, — an order which was carried out upon the instant.

"And now," said he, "since we are here to enjoy ourselves, let 's set about it."

VII.

BLINDMAN'S-BUFF.

Of the five persons thus brought together by the caprice of chance, only one appreciated Madame de Mailly at her real value.

Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu found himself fairly launched as one of the king's most intimate circle, and about to witness a scene which his astute intellect, having in view a well-defined secret purpose, would surely turn to the best use that could be made of it.

The Comte and Comtesse de Toulouse endured with some annoyance the king's whim, which made them participants in a clandestine pleasure-party with a person almost unknown at court, with no connections there, and in no way distinguished above the ordinary nobility.

Madame de Mailly, frightened and bewildered, a prey to the twofold torment of her thoughts and of the possibilities which those thoughts revealed to her, still excited by her rupture with her husband, found herself upon strange ground, breathing an unfamiliar atmosphere, like a transplanted shrub hovering between life and death.

The king knew nothing of all these conflicting emotions; his only thought was that he was going to escape the wearisome etiquette which ordinarily attended his retirement for the night, to enjoy two or three hours of fooling, and to vex a lot of people who would hear about the strange freak on the morrow.

Richelieu observed that when the ladies arrived he gallantly took the hand of Madame de Toulouse, and paid scarcely any heed to poor Madame de Mailly.

Beside his Majesty, there stood, straight and solid as an oak, a man in the prime of life, with a frank, open countenance, refined in its very coarseness. He was clad in green velvet, and occupied a middle position between the greatest dignitaries and the most humble servitors of the court.

He was the favorite valet-de-chambre of the King of France. Bachelier he was called by Louis, Monsieur Bachelier by the courtiers. A person of great influence within doors was Bachelier, but he thought little and worried little about external politics. He was the happy mortal who had the king under his charge from his retiring to his rising inclusive, and who enjoyed the privilege — so coveted by all, and which he would not have surrendered for the world — of sleeping in the royal apartment.

While the Comte de Toulouse was talking with the king, and the two ladies were talking together, Richelieu, always with an eye to the main chance, exchanged a few words with this omnipotent bed-chamber minister, who never made advances to anybody, but in whom the whole court centred, and to whom everybody bent the knee.

"Well, we are in for a little pleasure-party, it seems," said the duke, with a gracious smile to the valet, who saluted the heir of the great cardinal with an answering smile, as condescending as it was haughty.

"It seems, Monsieur le Duc, that we are going to make a night of it. So much the worse for the king! for his Majesty will surely be ill to-morrow."

"Really! His Majesty's health is not robust, then, Monsieur Bachelier?"

"Quite the contrary, Monsieur le Duc; but he will probably get over-excited; then he will sleep badly, and our day to-morrow will show the effects of it."

Monsieur Bachelier said "our day," for he quite justifiably looked upon his Majesty's day as his own.

Richelieu smiled, — he knew Monsieur Bachelier of old.

"Do you think, then, my dear Bachelier, that his Majesty will retain memories of the night?"

"Most assuredly I do."

"Madame de Toulouse still occupies his thoughts?"

"Oh, no, that 's all over."

"Will it be Madame de Mailly, then?" asked Richelieu, eagerly.

"Not yet, Monsieur le Duc; but it 's a great pity that it should not be."

"Why so, if I may ask?"

"Just look at her, — examine her carefully. But pardon me, Monsieur le Duc, I am not encroaching on your preserves, I trust!"

"Not in the least, my dear Bachelier. Monsieur de Mailly is neither relative nor friend of mine, so you may speak with perfect freedom. I even request you to do so, as it concerns our common interests."

Monsieur Bachelier felt peculiarly flattered by the duke's phrase, in which he thus coupled himself with his Majesty's first valet-de-chambre.

"Just see what a creature that is, Monsieur le Duc! Look at her hands and her arms! and her neck and her hair and her eyes, how beautiful they all are! See how her blood speaks out in the graceful sweep of her figure; and what lovely teeth!"

"She is a little thin," said Richelieu.

"Too much spirit, Monsieur le Duc, — too much

spirit, take my word for it. I hardly know the woman," added Bachelier, in much the same tone in which he might have said, "I don't know that mare." "I have been looking at her all the evening. There 's fire in her blood, Monsieur, — wild fire."

"But the king has no eye for the ladies."

"He sees them all the same," replied Bachelier.

"He is bashful."

"Yes, his Majesty will never lisp a word of love to any one."

"Who will begin, then, or rather make him begin? Respect will prevent them all from speaking first."

"There 's a pair of eyes which would not be long in expressing themselves, once the heart was engaged," said Bachelier, smiling; "those eyes would speak very plainly, and would most certainly make themselves understood."

Bachelier heaved a sigh.

"Bachelier," said Richelieu, "when can I say a few words in your ear in private?"

The valet caught the duke's eye, and for the moment neither sought to conceal his thoughts from the other. Their mutual understanding was complete.

"When you choose, Monseigneur."

"When are you at leisure?"

"The king will return to Paris during the day to-morrow."

"By carriage?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc."

"And you?"

"I go in the saddle with the household."

"I shall be in the saddle too. Stay behind, and let the household go on ahead, and we will have a little talk."

"At your service, Monsieur le Duc."

"Bachelier!" called the king.

And he ordered him to prepare a card-table.

But before long the game seemed a very tedious and insipid amusement to these personages, who indulged in it every day in public.

They sat down to supper with increased animation.

It was an entertaining diversion for them to be very careful about making a noise, to make sure that the corks were not drawn with an explosion, and to pitch their voices so that they would be indistinguishable from the moaning of the wind without.

When the repast was concluded, the Duc de Richelieu, who had assumed the leadership of the party by virtue of his great experience, proposed that they play some more noisy games.

They were all tired with keeping silence so long.

So they started on a game of blindman's-buff, a form of amusement fertile in surprises and opportunities for mad antics.

In the vast apartment tenanted by the king, the blind man was cast adrift among a hilarious crew. Monsieur le Comte de Toulouse was the first to try his hand. The lot had decided it, and Monsieur the Grand Admiral was unlucky.

The king began to show great animation. He grew excited over the little shrieks of the women, — shrieks which were uttered in a tone that expressed much more emotion than fear. He was especially amused by the warnings which the crafty Bachelier kept whispering to him every moment: "Sire, they'll hear you in the château."

At last Monsieur de Toulouse caught the king, who a willing victim, and guessed his identity correctly.

It was a curious spectacle.

Monsieur de Richelieu was well aware how absurd it would be if the king should catch him, and so he avoided him with the utmost care. On the other hand there was the fear of allowing the prince to wear the bandage too long.

The ladies, deeply interested in the game, ran hither and thither, taking shelter behind chairs and tables.

Louis, with ears alert and arms extended, paying little heed to the traditional cry of "Casse-cou!" followed the waves of perfume, and the silken rustle of the dresses, and the sound of satin slippers upon the carpet.

One little scream would turn him in one direction, and another head him back again; he would rush off madly toward the quarter where somebody was in collision with a piece of furniture, and the next moment make for a hand-clapping in the opposite corner.

His Majesty devoted his attention particularly to following the ladies, whose hurried steps he could detect, as well as their loud breathing, and the soft ejaculations which they let fall at every step.

The Comtesse de Toulouse, small and plump, yet light as air, leaped from shelter to shelter; her smooth white bosom rose and fell quickly beneath the velvet knots of her corsage.

Madame de Mailly, taller and more shapely, slender and straight as Diana, stretched out her lovely arms, while her eyes sparkled with joy and excitement.

The king was running after Madame de Toulouse; Madame de Mailly, seeing that the princess was the object of his attack, thought she should have time to cross the salon behind the king.

But when half-way across, Louis heard her; she was

betrayed by the rustling of her dress, which was worked with silver-wire. The king darted toward her, wheeling about upon his high heels; and he had only to extend his arms to enclose the palpitating countess within them as in a trap.

Louis' hands rested upon her shoulders, which were not so fully rounded out as those of Madame de Toulouse; the restless fingers of the young monarch touched lightly the satin of her dress, which was, contrary to the fashion at court, cut very high in the neck, instead of stopping half-way between the waist and shoulders.

The countess was modest or coquettish to that extent, — modest, said her partisans; coquettish, said her foes.

The king, finding dress-material under his hands where, had it been Madame de Toulouse, he would have encountered the natural covering only, cried out, —

"It is not Madame la Comtesse de Toulouse!"

This cry escaped him, in spite of himself; it declared at once the physical superiority of the Grand Admiral's spouse, and the difference which the king had noticed between the two.

To be sure, Louis, instead of exclaiming, "It is not Madame la Comtesse de Toulouse!" might have said, "It is Madame la Comtesse de Mailly!"

But to explain himself thus explicitly would have been equivalent to saying that he recognized Madame de Mailly by the prudery or the coquetry of her high-necked dress.

To the mind of that poor creature the king's remark had so much significance that it tore from her a sigh of vast proportions, — almost a cry, almost tears, — and led her to reply, as if involuntarily, —

"Alas! no, Sire, it is not Madame la Comtesse de Toulouse!"

Louis liked quick wit, and appreciated it; he had it himself.

He realized the force of the blow he had dealt; his hands slid from the shoulders of the countess to her hands, which were moist and cold and trembling.

Richelieu watched him closely.

"There was an affront," he said to himself, "which Madame de Mailly may turn to very great advantage, if she chooses."

He was not mistaken.

Madame de Mailly took the bandage from the king's eyes, and bound it, still warm, upon her icy brow. All her blood had flowed back to her heart.

The game was renewed.

The king, anxious to repair his error, threw himself in front of the countess, in a determined effort to force her to catch him.

She clasped him in her arms, and pressed him so close that the color left her cheeks, and she nearly swooned with pleasure.

"Ah!" she whispered; "it is the king."

She added, for her own ear alone,—

"Who could it be, if it were not he?"

Richelieu and Bachelier exchanged a swift glance.

The king was flushed and breathing hard; his eyes shone like stars.

"Enough!" said he, with throbbing pulses.

"Oh, yes, enough!" stammered Madame de Mailly.

VIII.

DUKE AND VALET-DE-CHAMBRE.

STRONG emotions naturally demand an opportunity for repose. Over-excitement, as Bachelier said, is the elder sister of prostration.

The tendency to dreamy reverie of our two friends who were thus brought into sympathetic connection with each other, put an end to the festivities.

No other game was suggested.

After some attempts at conversation, in which Richelieu was absent-minded, the king sleepy, the Comte and Comtesse de Toulouse uninterested, and Louise de Neale extremely nervous, the king made a sign to Bachelier, who appeared at the door of the cabinet, candlestick in hand.

He handed the candlestick to the king, from whose hands Monsieur le Comte de Toulouse received it with a low reverence; and this sudden return to serious matters — that is to say, to the formal court etiquette — at once restored the company to that respectful attention which is entirely inconsistent with reverie.

The king was left alone long before the hour which he had himself named for the conclusion of the diversions of the night.

The next day Richelieu was very careful not to forget his appointment with Bachelier.

While the king was on his way to Paris in a carriage with the Captain of his Swiss Guards and the Comtesse de Toulouse; while Madame de Mailly, who took her

departure at the same time without a single significant glance or even a paltry word of leave-taking from the king, was having a lonely journey in the fine carriage in which she returned to Paris, Richelieu overtook my lord Bachelier on a fine jennet, about two hundred paces behind the cortege.

At this time people could still remember the trips which the late king used to make to Fontainebleau with his entire household, when some thirty carriages or more, forming a line half a league in length, would wind along the roads and through the patches of forest, fringed with a double file of musketeers or light-horse, laughing, drumming, and whistling in a fashion to frighten away all the jays and magpies in the province.

When the superb parade of prancing horses, gleaming weapons, and magnificent equipages woke the echoes of some village, the peasants would appear at the doors or the wretched little windows of their huts, gaping with wondering admiration, and laughing with pleasure to see so many splendid seigneurs.

And if some whipper-in or stable-boy remained behind because he was hungry or thirsty, or to adjust a girth or punch a hole in a strap, the whole village, taking courage when they saw only one at a time, would pounce upon the laggard like ants upon carrion.

Then questions would come thick and fast, followed by offers of milk and sour wine and brown bread.

"How is the king?"

"Which is the king?"

"Who is the lady in the king's carriage?"

"Who was the man with the blue ribbon, riding at his Majesty's carriage door?"

The servant, bursting with importance, would condescend to talk with the peasants, tell them the news of

the day, say "us," and at last make off at a gallop upon his sluggish horse, leaving his auditors in amazed admiration, as he was lost to sight in the dust.

In his youthful days, when he was adored by his subjects, Louis XV. aroused emotion of another sort; it was idolatry rather than curiosity.

Wherever he passed, he saw only arms extended, women weeping, and men praying with their eyes wet with tears.

Some dreamed of kissing the king's boot; others would have given their lives to kiss his hand; and there were many, who, like the worshippers of Juggernaut, would have asked no sweeter boon than to be crushed beneath the gilded wheels of his chariot.

Richelieu and Bachelier, remaining behind, began their conversation like men who knew the value of time and of a clear understanding.

"Well," said Richelieu, "did you see yesterday — did you see how nearly right you were?"

Bachelier reflected. He did not care to have been too nearly right with so great a nobleman as Monsieur de Richelieu certainly was, in position if not in name.

"Right in what particular, Monsieur le Duc?" he asked humbly.

"Why, in your prediction!"

"Did I predict something?"

"Don't you remember what you said to me?"

"On what subject?"

"*Apropos* of the king and Madame de Mailly."

"Well?"

"The king took Madame de Mailly's measure."

"And Madame de Mailly took the king's."

Bachelier began to laugh, and Richelieu laughed with him.

For the moment the duke was paying court to the valet.

"What will be the end of all that, do you think, my dear Bachelier?"

"Of all that?"

"Yes; of what took place yesterday, I mean."

"Nothing, Monsieur le Duc."

"What! nothing?"

"No."

"Go to! You say that the king is very excitable; you claim that Louise de Mailly is of the ardent temperament characteristic of the De Nesle women, and yet you say now that these two inflammable natures when brought in juxtaposition will not sigh for each other!"

"Very good, Monsieur le Duc; but the king wavers."

"Wavers?"

"Yes."

"Between whom? On what subject?"

"The king thinks of the queen; he is troubled with remorse. Since he left Versailles, he has thought much about Versailles. Since the queen turned her back on him, he has regretted her; her image haunts him. Believe me, Monsieur le Duc, I have seen the king shiver and shake sometimes, from seven o'clock in the evening, just from thinking that at ten he was to go to the queen's apartments; and at least ten times, as I was carrying his sword thither, I have heard his Majesty's heart beat beneath the lace of his waistcoat."

"With love, do you mean?"

"Physical love, if you please, Monsieur le Duc, but, at all events, love of the utmost vehemence. This sort of passion is very hard to forget. I would swear that the queen, cold as she is to her husband, — I would swear, I say, that the queen, who is so harsh to this fine

young man, will, whenever she may choose, take precedence of all these capricious figures which are flitting around him."

Richelieu ignored the poetical flight of his companion.

"Will she ever choose, Bachelier?" he asked.

"Never."

"You are sure of it?"

"Morally and physically sure, Monsieur le Duc."

Bachelier emphasized the two adverbs, like a man who knows the value of every letter of the alphabet.

"Very well; since you are morally and physically sure of the queen's indifference," said Richelieu, repeating the valet's words, "let us set out from that point, my friend. The king is wavering, you say?"

"Yes; he is in love with a shadow."

"Whose name is —"

"Ah, Monseigneur, right here my embarrassment begins. The other evening the shadow's name was Olympe; it was a lovely actress whom he had seen act, a girl who inspires love of the heart and of the senses at the same time."

"Pshaw! an actress! and I knew nothing of it!"

"That is not surprising."

"Why?"

"Because she is just from the provinces, and you from Vienna."

"True. Let us return to Olympe, dear Monsieur Bachelier. What sort of a creature is she?"

"She 's a damsel who has an ankle as slender as a kid's; great eyes, open and closed at the same time, which makes them languishing and deadly; hands like a baby's; the arm of a Cleopatra; the neck of Holbein's Anne Boleyn; and, so far as could be seen, Mademoiselle de Charolais' bust."

"Well, well! why, she must be the goddess Venus in person, my dear Bachelier. And you say that the king — "

"The king has dreamed about her, Monseigneur. I don't know whose she is."

"*Pardieu!* she is the king's, if the king wants her."

"They say no."

"She is well guarded, is she?"

"Better than that; she guards herself."

"Nonsense! nonsense! Tell me, Bachelier, are you sure that the king is in love with her?"

"If I were sure of it, Monsieur le Duc, I would have tried before this to cure his disappointment, but I am afraid of drawing the cover blank. You who have hunted with the king, Monsieur le Duc," continued Bachelier, with a smile, "know how ill-humored that makes him."

"Very well, Bachelier, go on; you are a great philosopher, my friend."

Bachelier bowed; it was evident that his own opinion of himself coincided with that expressed by Richelieu.

"I have said," he continued, "that I thought the other evening that the king's head, if not his heart, was full of this Olympe; so I did n't lose sight of him while he was awake, to see if he would speak of her; and I listened while he was asleep to see if he would dream of her. He said nothing, awake or asleep; on the contrary, I heard him ask for an invitation to Rambouillet. He had received a rebuff from the queen. Every time that an idea enters his head, he goes to do penance at her Majesty's feet; he asks nothing more than to be a worthy husband *à la mode de* Rue Saint-Martin. Poor king! The queen herself will be the one to blame if he becomes a husband *à la mode de* Versailles."

"You are a clever fellow, Bachelier, and I am no longer despondent concerning the king."

"Monsieur le Duc is too kind."

"Go on."

"Well! as he asked three times this morning if the queen had sent him no message, it's clear that his thoughts were busy with somebody during the night. Was it Olympe? Was it Madame de Toulouse? Was it Louise de Mailly?"

Worthy Bachelier suppressed the "Mademoiselle" or the "Madame" with a freedom which bore witness to his power.

"Well?"

"My reply to my own question," he added, seeing Richelieu's perplexity, "is this: It was not Olympe, because he has not seen her again; it was not Madame de Toulouse, because he has no hopes in that quarter."

"It was Madame de Mailly, then, Bachelier?"

"Yes and no, Monsieur le Duc."

"Wait a moment," said the duke, "and I will tell you a circumstance which may perhaps assist you."

Richelieu told him what he had observed at the time of the blindman's-buff.

"I think," said he, "that sympathetic communication was established between them for a moment."

"Madame de Mailly, Monseigneur, has her moments of weakness, like every good Frenchwoman in presence of her king; but, after all, she has moral principle, and a husband —"

"A husband, my dear Bachelier, a husband who neglects her."

"Aha!"

"Who abandons her, and she is proud."

"But it is essential, I think I have already told you,

that she be not proud, if she wishes that the king — It will even be necessary that she should be — "

"That 's the difficulty. However, I will admit that I don't think that 's the only difficulty."

"Tell me what you mean, Monseigneur."

"Suppose the king to be in love, deeply in love, with Louise de Mailly, — or with Olympe, if you choose."

Bachelier smiled.

"That smile I can understand," said Richelieu, looking amiably at the valet, who seemed to see his own reflection in the duke's eyes. "It means, if I mistake not, that the king will be in love only with such ones as you choose."

"Monseigneur, I did not say that."

"But you *do* it, my dear Bachelier; and that is much better."

"Monseigneur, it is most absolutely necessary that it should be so; otherwise, as you know yourself, the utmost confusion would ensue."

"You dabble in politics, then."

"For our own interests, yes. Lebel and I have joined forces. The king belongs to us, who have taken care of him, reared him, and taught him. He belongs to us more than to anybody else."

"Monsieur de Fréjus makes much the same claim."

"Monsieur de Fréjus has the king when he is dressed in his kingly robes. We have him in his bedroom, in his bed and in his bath. That is why we think that we have him more than all the rest of the world. We have the young man; let them have the king."

"You are quite right. I say again then, Bachelier, that you will not share the possession of the king, since he is yours, with any save those whom you judge to be of the right sort and worthy so to share him."

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"Do you think well of Olympe?"

"I desire to speak frankly to you, Monseigneur."

"By all means, especially as I mean to be perfectly frank myself. If it is profitable to share the king with you, I desire to make it profitable for you to share him with me."

"Ah, very good!"

"I know that you have everything you want, that you are not inordinately ambitious, that you care but little for dignities, but that you do like fine estates and good honest louis d'or."

"That's no more than natural, Monseigneur; I have not enough gentle blood to avoid being laughed at, if I chose to wear a blue ribbon or become a peer of the realm. But if I have money and land, my son and my daughter will be able to purchase whatever their ambition shall counsel them to acquire, at some future day."

"Bachelier, I will go on with what I was saying. You know the small entailed estate of Fronsac, do you not?"

"The one which produces an income of sixteen thousand livres, Monseigneur, and is watered by two rivers?"

"Yes, Bachelier: do you think well of it?"

"I should have a perfect passion for it, were it not a dukedom with a peerage attached."

"Being entailed, it loses its privileges; it remains a rentable property, made much more valuable by the fact that it has no justice-tax or road-tax to pay, but becomes a simple seigniory."

"I understand."

"It is a most suitable appanage for a worthy servant of the king, who has obtained his patent of nobility and dreams of the possibility, for the third generation, of a

baronial if not a ducal crest upon the porch of the Château."

"True, Monseigneur."

"Bachelier, if I furnish the king with a mistress of my selection, you shall purchase Fronsac, and I will give you the deed in return for a hand-shake."

"Monseigneur, that is doing business like the great man that you are."

"You accept?"

"One objection. As to furnishing the king with a mistress, I do not want it to be a woman to meddle with politics."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean this, and you will agree with me, that if we put the king under political guardianship, the guardian will domineer over us all."

"That 's a difficulty."

"Do you know Madame de Mailly well? for I see that it is she whom you have in mind for his Majesty."

"She or another; I don't limit myself to her by any means. After what you have said I must make serious investigation."

"Understand me, Monsieur le Duc. The cardinal desires to guide the State; the King of Poland desires to guide the queen; the queen would be very glad to guide the king. The king, perhaps, would not like any too well to be guided by his mistress. What would be the result of this conflict of ambitions? War, inevitably, — war, of which all the disasters would fall upon the king, that is to say, upon us. Now, I am growing old, and have begun to get fat. My *embonpoint* becomes me, they say, and I don't care to lose it. That is why I want peace in the establishment, at any price."

"Oh, yes," said Richelieu; "what you say is eminently sensible, my dear Bachelier."

"If the queen becomes jealous, and the mistress undertakes to play the part of a second queen, there will be war, and the mistress will be sent away, for the queen will have a dauphin as a counterpoise to the bastards. If the mistress turns out to be the stronger, the queen, who is much beloved here, will be humiliated; and from the hatred of the Parisians will come stones against my windows, and the glass in your carriage. Exile, the Bastille,—who knows? The domain of Fronsac, Monseigneur, will produce no more good wine for you or for me. Let us avoid such grave possibilities by giving to the king a mistress whose masters we shall be."

"Oh, Bachelier! Bachelier! what a wise head you carry on your shoulders! Verily, King Solomon would be unworthy to be your valet-de-chambre."

"Self-interest, Monseigneur, is a philosophical tract which fixes the tariff upon all the emotions, and accurately measures all the faults. I had already fixed my choice upon this actress, who would have amused the king as Monsieur was amused in the old days by La Raisin, that lovely girl of humble origin."

"Yes, but look out that an actress does not get control of the king; that would never do."

"At certain hours it might happen, Monseigneur."

"But that is not enough, Bachelier; what we must have is a passion that will engross him all the time. Otherwise, and you have not thought of this, the king will have three or four different favorites all at once, thrust upon him by chance or curiosity, or love of show. And then there will need to be as many Bacheliers as there are favorites."

"Ah, Monseigneur, there spoke the true diplomatist.

It is easy to see why you are an ambassador, and I only a valet-de-chambre. Most certainly every one must remain at his post, and I propose to remain at mine."

"Only one favorite, only one, Bachelier; that's my advice."

"Then it must be a very reliable favorite."

"Let us find one who is in love with the king; then we shall be sure of her."

"In love with the king, Monsieur le Duc! What ideas you do have! Alas! La Vallières aren't born every day."

"Pshaw! it's only a question of choosing a brunette instead of a blonde, that's all. The former will last longer. So you have nothing against Madame de Mailly?"

"Absolutely nothing, when you have proved to me that she will not meddle with politics."

"I will prove that to your satisfaction, if she will permit me."

"I warn you that I shall be very exacting, Monseigneur; I am playing for too high a stake."

"How so? I am in for half of it."

"No, Monseigneur, you have interests opposed to mine. To you intrigue is the essential,—that is to say, war under another name. On every battlefield you win an office or a decoration; from one mistress you get one thing, from another something else; while I get nothing but blows."

"Bachelier, I will prove to you that I am coursing the same hare as you."

"If you do that, Monseigneur, I will say, 'Agreed!'"

"But first, upon your honor, have you made no promises in any other direction?"

"Not seriously, no."

"But jokingly?"

"Ah! that 's another matter."

"Come, be frank, Bachelier, be frank!"

Bachelier stopped his horse for a moment, and Richelieu did the same.

Bachelier looked about him, and Richelieu scanned the horizon in all directions.

"Monseigneur," said the valet, "somebody spoke to me last evening."

"When was that? I did n't leave your side," said Richelieu, with a degree of animation which denoted the importance of the revelation.

"Last evening, before you joined me."

"Oh, yes! Come, be frank, Bachelier, for God's sake!"

"I will, Monseigneur; I will be frank with you."

"Well, who was it then, my dear Bachelier?"

"Monsieur de Pecquigny."

"In Olympe's behalf?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And you said —"

"That I would think it over, Monseigneur."

The duke knitted his brows.

"After all," said he, "my dear Bachelier, you must see that my reasoning is sound, and that an actress —"

"Monseigneur, an actress will keep her fingers out of politics: you see I always come back to that point; it is my *Delenda Carthago*."

Richelieu realized the valet's tenacity of purpose, which held firm as a vice.

"Oh!" said he, "your Olympe may last a month!"

"So be it, Monseigneur; then we will find some one else who will last another month."

Richelieu's mouth was closed again.

"You don't deceive me, Monseigneur, as to your real intention, which is to give the king a female politician for a mistress. Why fight shy with me when I am playing all my cards on the table with you, and am going straight ahead? Why play the game out with a man who has only to say 'yes' or 'no,' to overturn your card-house, which you have built with so much labor but on such an insecure foundation? Once more I say, the king shall never have, with my consent, and I will never give my support to, a mistress who will talk politics with him. When that comes about, Monseigneur, you may be certain that I shall be no more; and believe me, Monseigneur, I am firm of foot and dry of eye, and my nails are hard, and I have promised myself to live so long that it will be necessary to kill me to be rid of me."

"Bachelier," said the duke, after some moments of reflection, "I give you my word as a gentleman, that I will do nothing without you."

"Useless to take any oaths, Monseigneur; but I defy you to do anything without me."

"You don't understand me," rejoined Richelieu, vexed by the man's arrogance, but restraining his annoyance; "I promise you that I will keep you informed of whatever I do."

"And I, Monseigneur," said Bachelier, in a pacified tone, "promise you that I will keep you thoroughly posted. In any event you could not take a hundred steps without me, before you would acknowledge the truth of what I say. Any woman whom you might give to the king to govern the State for him, would govern you more than anybody else. Be careful then. If she is in love, she will submit to the yoke, for it is a light one. If she is cold and selfish, she will either use you

or ruin you. Beware! A simple-minded creature, living from one day to another, unable to get along without you and me, will not bother her head with Monsieur de Fleury, nor the Duc de Bourbon, nor Jansenists, nor Austrians; she will do for the king what the Queen of Spain does for Philippe V. That is enough, God knows! Europe is inclined to think it 's too much."

"Bachelier, you have more wit in your portmanteau than I have in my ambassadorial palace."

"An hour ago, Monseigneur, I feared I should find it unavailing. But, see, they are beginning to look back. We have been seen talking together, and there will be comment upon it. You and I, one at the top and the other at the foot of the ladder, will be the most talked-about men at court. Come, let us separate; it would be wiser."

"I have your promise?"

"Conditionally."

"I accept the condition, Bachelier."

"Then the promise will be kept, Monseigneur."

Whereupon Bachelier and the duke parted.

IX.

THE LOVE OF THE SHADOW.

THE gentle reader may perhaps remember that Pecquigny, feigning indisposition, had requested permission to leave Rambouillet just as his Majesty Louis XV. was passing from the little theatre to the salon; and it will also be remembered that the king had graciously accorded that permission.

Pecquigny thereupon had returned post-haste to Paris; he left the king at ten o'clock, and at quarter-past twelve was at the Hôtel de Nesle.

It can easily be understood that after what had taken place in the morning, the Hôtel de Nesle was not the most likely spot on earth at which to find Monsieur de Mailly, and, as a matter of fact, he was not there.

Pecquigny was so persistent in questioning a valet-de-chambre, who knew him to be one of his master's close friends, that the man said to him in an undertone, —

"Monsieur le Duc desires to see Monsieur le Comte at once!"

"I am so anxious to see him," said Pecquigny, "that I will give twenty-five louis to the one who will tell me where I can find him."

"Monsieur le Duc takes away all the merit of doing him a service for nothing," said the valet.

"Were you going to tell me where he is?" asked Pecquigny.

"Certainly."

"Well, then, tell me, my friend, and imagine that I give you the twenty-five louis for something else."

"Done. Monsieur le Comte is at his little place on Rue Grange-Batelière."

"Good!"

"Do you know it?"

"Yes. It 's all right, my friend, that 's all I wanted to know."

Pecquigny went around by way of the Pont Neuf, as the wickets of the Louvre were closed at midnight.

Mailly was, in fact, as his valet said, at his secret establishment.

Somewhat bewildered at first by the scene with the countess, he had ordered a saddle to be put upon the horse he had tried an hour before, and which had been taken back to the stables.

Leaping lightly upon his back, he had gone for a ride in the Cours-la-Reine.

At first he was, as we have said, bewildered by the blow which the countess had struck; but youth, experience with the gentle sex, and hope for the future speedily console a man for wounded pride.

Nevertheless the count was taken aback for a moment, during which he experienced sensations he had never felt before.

In fact, this most unlooked for revelation of his wife's character had caused him a certain feeling of disappointment which he could not account for satisfactorily.

Soon, however, he began to realize one thing; and that was that if he allowed gloomy thoughts connected with the Hôtel de Nesle to take the upper hand in his mind, they would eventually overpower his cheerful thoughts of the little house on Rue Grange-Batelière.

The outcome of his reflections was a resolution to

fight Louise de Mailly with Olympe de Clèves, since he had the last-named weapon at hand.

So he became once more the true nobleman of 1726, — that is to say, the heir of the regency, — cast aside his disagreeable thoughts, shook his ear, as the saying was, and about eight o'clock in the evening rushed off to visit Olympe, upon whom he had decided to rest all his hopes of earthly happiness.

Men are strangely constructed; they are forever quoting horrible examples to others, but never take warning themselves. The difficulty is that each one thinks that he is made of different clay from other men, — clay of a superior quality, which is made perfect, in his own case, by taking advantage of all the defects in other poor mortals.

To have a fickle wife and an imperious mistress is thus a double misfortune. Mailly was not a fool, all things considered. Nevertheless he imagined that the faults of his wife's character were due to his having given her too much freedom, while Olympe's defects sprang from being held under too severe restraint.

He had left Paris to go in search of her. Chance willed that he should find her at a moment when, in her desperation, she would have welcomed any expedient that promised relief. She had no need to offer herself to him, but she responded to his offer. Mailly had recaptured her, and had her now. What more could he desire?

Is it not true that for some men that which they possess is of vastly more value than the possessions of all the world? Happy, a hundred times happy, is the man who has sufficient pride to enrich his life, and increase an hundred-fold the worth of that which he possesses! Such a man feels the lack of nothing; his children are as lovely as those of the owl in the fable, —

lovely just because they are his; his copper dishes are silver, his silver gold, and his gold precious stones.

When such a man looks in a mirror, all his ugliness turns to beauty in his eyes, and such beauty as he has becomes surpassing loveliness.

Mailly, luckily for himself, was of such a temperament; he needed the appearance of misfortune to bring into play as an antidote all the cheerfulness of his imagination.

He betook himself, then, as we have said, to Olympe, who, carefully secluded, as much by her own choice as the count's, had not left the establishment on Rue Grange-Batelière, — except to make her second appearance, which was as successful as the first. Olympe was beginning to reflect seriously upon the propriety of taking measures to shake off the fierce ennui which was consuming her.

Alas! one cannot breathe the free air of heaven without feeling the loss of it; one cannot with impunity change from one lover to another, as the traveller changes his abiding-place; one cannot make comparisons without reflecting. Comparison is the bitter foe of contentment.

When Mailly reached Olympe's side, he found her lost in thought; ennui was in possession.

The count, whose mind was full of the conjugal scene of the morning, had also before his eyes his wife's disdainful features, contracted by that internal anger which is so much the more pitiless within, because it is denied external expression. The pallor of restrained emotion always disfigures a woman more or less; it deprives her eyes of the brilliancy which they should have, and imparts to them a flame which is not pleasant to contemplate.

The countess's hands were trembling, and her voice pitched in a strange key; she was less a wife than a bitter foe.

But when his eyes fell upon his mistress, calm and tranquil and glorious in her beauty, which seemed almost gentle in comparison, he said to himself, —

"It 's best so; I gain by the change."

He went up to her and took her hand.

"Dear Olympe," said he, "how lovely you are!"

Olympe rose, looked in a mirror, and said as she resumed her seat, —

"Ennui improves one's looks, then."

"Are you bored, Olympe?" said De Mailly, hoping that her ennui was due to his having left her alone.

"I am always bored," she replied.

"Oh, well," said Mailly, "I have some news for you which will interest you and divert you, unless you are very hard to please."

"What is the news?" asked Olympe.

"Well, my dear, I have to inform you that your two appearances have made a great commotion in the city, and at court too."

"Really?" said Olympe; "you are very good."

"It seems that the king himself is more delighted than you can imagine."

Olympe shrugged her shoulders.

"I know well enough," continued De Mailly, "that the king's opinion matters little to you."

Olympe smiled.

"A woman of your worth is as good as any queen; however, in your capacity of actress, it is flattering to your talent — "

"I have no talent," Olympe interrupted.

"You have no talent?"

"I am wrong. I should say that I have lost what talent I had."

"How about beauty, then?"

"Beauty is a thing which has no perfume unless it is diffused."

"Oho!" exclaimed De Mailly, with a forced laugh. "Permit me to tell you, dear Olympe, that such maxims grate on my ears."

"Why so?"

"Because, dearest, I am like a miser, guarding his treasure."

"A sleeping treasure."

"Yes, but sleeping for its proprietor, dear Olympe."

"A man is not the proprietor of a woman," said Olympe, shaking her head.

"Oho!"

"Unless she be a Georgian, like Mademoiselle Aissé, or the proprietor be a Monsieur de Féréolles."

"Olympe!"

"Unless, instead of calling himself proprietor, he calls himself jailer."

Mailly felt a cold shiver run through his veins.

"What!" said he, "do you really mean to speak thus to me, my dear?"

"I don't seem to be speaking to anybody else," retorted Olympe.

"Pray, what have I done to you?"

"You? Nothing."

"Come, Olympe, have you not loved me?"

"Formerly very dearly, yes."

"Does it give you no pleasure to receive my visits now?"

"I don't say that it does not."

"I implored you," he said, taking courage from this

very slight admission, "to come and live in my little house here, because it was not decent for such a woman as you to be living in lodgings in the city like any actress."

"Am I not an actress?"

"You are a young lady of quality."

"I am a young lady of the theatre."

"Is not your name Mademoiselle Olympe de Clèves?"

"If you were free, Monsieur de Mailly, would you marry Mademoiselle Olympe de Clèves?"

The count was staggered.

"Really," said he, "you will make me think that you are seeking a quarrel with me."

"On what subject, Monsieur le Comte?"

"You recriminate, and sigh, and shrug your shoulders."

"True."

"And when I ask you for the cause of all these signals of distress, you reply, 'Ennui.'"

"True again."

"Do you wish for liberty, then?"

"Am I asking for anything?"

"Are you no longer content with my love?"

"Count, don't question me, I beg you."

"Why not, for Heaven's sake?"

"Because questions weary me."

"But after all, Madame, you did not consent to come with me because you were forced to do so."

"Here?"

"No; down there at Lyons. When I sought you out, you said nothing to me to make me suspect all this suffering which you complain of to-day; you made no conditions precedant to coming with me."

"It is true, I did not."

"I promised that you should appear at the Comédie, and I have kept my promise."

"Have I made any complaints?"

"No, but you are not happy living in this house."

"Did I conceal my disinclination to come here?"

"What is it that annoys you?"

"Hold, Monsieur le Comte!" said Olympe; "we shall never understand each other."

"But do you love me?"

"I have much affection for you; you are a very worthy gentleman."

With these words Olympe sighed deeply.

Mailly frowned as he heard the sigh, and appeared to decide upon his course.

"It is especially disheartening to me to have you treat me so ungraciously, Olympe, as I have just given myself absolute freedom."

Olympe looked keenly at him.

"Were you not free?" said she.

"Not altogether."

Olympe's eyes were still upon him.

"I was married," said he.

"Is your wife dead?" cried Olympe, in alarm.

"Better than that: she has made me sign a deed of separation."

"What for, pray?"

"Because I made her too unhappy."

"If you must say such things, Monsieur le Comte, pray say them so that I can't hear you."

"Why should I not say them to you?"

"What! your wife leaves you because she is too unhappy with you?"

"Too unhappy because of my love for you, Olympe."

"Oh, don't boast of this sacrifice to me!"

"I boast of nothing; I simply tell you the fact."

"Poor woman!"

"Do you pity the countess?"

"Of course; it would be much better for you to leave me, I assure you, and restore peace to Madame de Mailly's heart."

"Are you mad, Olympe, to ask me to leave you?"

"You have left your wife. Why should you not leave your mistress?"

"Impossible! Olympe, I love you more than I have ever loved. I can find reason enough for it in your spirit, and your goodness to me. But it is one reason more for not consenting to suffer the loss of so priceless a treasure. No, not at any price will I leave you free to love another."

"Take care what you say! You have left me once already."

"I thought I had explained to you the cause of that separation. My people wished to marry me, and succeeded in doing so; their object was to perpetuate the family name, and in that they have failed. Ah! if instead of meeting you on the stage, I had only met you in the society in which your birth entitles you to shine!"

"Come, come, Count, be careful what you say, or I shall begin to think that I make you talk like a coward."

"I don't understand you, Olympe."

"You left me, Count, because you had had enough of me; you took me back again because you had had too much of your wife."

"Put it so if you please, but love is like a new building which settles down until it finds its proper level; when that is once found, it is all right, and the building lasts forever."

"Oh! but that's an unfortunate illustration, Count."

"Why?"

"My love has not yet found its level."

"So that —"

"So that I am bored to death."

"Still?"

"All the time."

"But, after all, what cause is there for your ennui?"

"Suppose it were nothing but uncertainty as to my real position?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean just that. Am I free or a prisoner? May I go out, or must I stay in the house?"

"Olympe, you are free! you know it very well. Only —"

"Only —"

"Only it would be a bitter thing to me to see you plunge into dissipation, to see men around you who would make you listen to them. Olympe, jealousy is not familiar to my mind."

"You pride yourself on not being jealous?"

"One may pride one's self upon it, so long as one is not."

"And suppose one is?"

"Then life does not seem possible without keeping watch."

"So you propose to watch me?"

"God forbid!"

"Yet you say you are jealous."

"Yes."

"Very jealous?"

"Insanely so."

"It 's all to no purpose, Count."

"Why so?"

"Why, *mon Dieu!* because the very day that I fall in love with any one, I will tell you so without delaying an hour, a minute, a second."

"Yes, you have told me that already."

"Well?"

"Well, that promise is no more satisfying to me the second time than the first."

"That is why I am astonished that you keep me so closely confined, Count. You know one thing."

"What is that?"

"That when I choose to go out, out I shall go."

"Alas, that is only too true!" sighed the count, with a terrible pain at his heart.

"For that reason," continued Olympe, "I can speak to anybody under the sun without giving you cause for uneasiness."

"But you don't appreciate my situation."

"No? Explain it to me, then."

"Faith, Olympe, I know you, and I know that you will not fail to warn me when your heart is won. You will say to me, 'I love such an one.' Alas! if you tell me that, my love, it will be because I, like a fool, have given you the opportunity. Whom will you love? Probably one of my friends, some man whom I shall have brought here and introduced to you; and when you tell me that, *mon Dieu!* it will be already too late to undo the mischief. I shall have to endure a calamity which I could and should have warded off from myself; I shall be well advanced on that road when you tell me frankly, 'I have ceased to love you.'"

"Oh! the logic is unexceptionable, and no link is missing."

"You admit that?"

"But you forget —"

"What?"

"Just one thing."

"What is it?"

"You neglect to provide for the contingency of my falling in love without any object to love."

"Oh, Olympe, such loves exist only in romances, and are never met with elsewhere."

"Count, Count," said Olympe, shaking her head, "there is no more dangerous romance than a woman's imagination, my word for it!"

"You, in love without any visible object!"

"I tell you it is quite possible."

"In that case I shall not be jealous. What harm can a phantom do me? What sort of a thing is the kiss of a shadow?"

Olympe seized De Mailly's hand, and gazed intently at him.

Then she said, in a tone which froze the blood in his heart,—

"Unhappy man! you know nothing about that which you affect to despise. The love of which you promise not to be jealous, is the most cruel, the most dangerous of all loves. She who loves a phantom, she who loves the shadow of a shade, she who listens to the voice of the wind, she who gazes at the setting sun, she who salutes the star as it rises, she who bathes in the rays of the moon, — she is lost beyond recall to the mortal who calls himself her lover. If she loves a nothing, it is because she has ceased to love something."

As she saw the terror depicted on the count's face at these words which fell from her lips with such cruel distinctness, she continued, —

"Oh, do not desire (it is I who say it) that your mistress should make you jealous of a shadow. Jealous of the vast universe, jealous of God himself, is he who cannot be jealous of any mortal. A man slays his enemy, and exchanges sword-thrusts with his rival: but

the shadow which is beloved of your mistress is an invisible foe, an intangible rival, an incessant, pitiless, unspeakable sorrow which bites and chafes and kills! Count, do not let me suffer from ennui; Count, do not, at any price, let my heart become an empty void! The shadow will find its way in, Count; and now you know what the love of the shadow is."

As she ceased speaking, Olympe, bursting with all that she had not said, uttered a stifled moan, and rose to go to her room; but long before she reached the door, she turned deadly pale, closed her eyes, and fell senseless upon the floor.

The count gazed at her as she lay, with more terror than anxiety, more anguish than love.

His expression grew more and more sombre.

"Upon my soul!" he muttered, "I am in bad luck to-day. Is it I who love too much, or does she not love me enough?"

He went to Olympe and took her in his arms, still unconscious, and carried her into her bedroom.

He had just laid her on the bed, when our old acquaintance, Claire, rushed into the room, crying to the count that one of his friends had forced the courtyard door and was making ready, if the outer door of the house was not opened, to do the same by that.

"And has this good friend condescended to tell his name?" said the count, frowning darkly.

"It is Monsieur de Pecquigny, just from Rambouillet, and he declares that he must speak to you."

"The Captain of the Guards!" cried Maillly; "it must be on the king's service. Claire, look to your mistress; I will go and receive Monsieur de Pecquigny."

With this he hurriedly left the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

X.

THE KING'S SERVICE.

THE danger was not so pressing as the femme-de-chambre had made it appear.

Pecquigny had forced the first door, it is true, but had not yet made his way into the reception-room.

He was in the courtyard astride a horse all covered with foam. A servant, also on horseback, stood a few feet from him.

The two, master and man, were directly within the rays of a huge lantern which lighted the courtyard; in the dim light the white foam with which the horses were covered, and the steam rising from their flanks could be plainly seen.

Mailly appeared at the door.

"Is it you, Duke?" he asked.

"Is it you, Count?" replied the duke, matching one question with another.

"Pray, what has happened?" asked Mailly, walking quickly toward the horseman.

"Ah! many things, Mailly, many things. But do you know that your people refuse to let me in?"

"I cannot find fault with them for obeying my orders to the letter, Duke; you know that here I am in my secret establishment?"

"Yes, and you keep it well locked and barred."

"Quite true."

"I had found that out; but if you keep this house closed so tightly, where do you suppose I can have a talk with you?"

"Have you something important to say to me?"

"*Pardieu!* do you suppose that otherwise I would come and rout you out at midnight?"

"Duke, I don't want you to take me for a surly knave who turns his friends away from his door; dismount, come in, and try to make yourself comfortable."

"How about some supper?"

"What! you have had no supper?"

"No, faith!"

"Whence do you come?"

"From Rambouillet, in a straight line, and I'm hungry."

"So much the better!"

"That's a pleasant hearing; explain it."

"That's easily done. It appears that the news cannot be so terrible as I feared at first. Come in, come in, my dear Pecquigny; and if you are hungry, why, you shall have some supper."

He led the duke into the house; the two horses were taken to the stable, and Pecquigny's servant was turned over to the valet-de-chambre.

Mailly escorted his nocturnal visitor into the *salle-à-manger* on the ground-floor, after he had whispered a few words into the ear of his valet.

"A fine fire, but little to eat," said Mailly; "but what would you have? We were not expecting so illustrious a guest. Come, make yourself at home."

Without waiting for a second invitation, Pecquigny proceeded to make himself at home in a huge easy-chair.

"So you come from Rambouillet?" asked Mailly.

"I arrived from there ten minutes ago."

"How is the king?"

"Too well, Count. You have dismissed your people, have you not?"

"I have only one valet-de-chambre here, the one you saw; he is busy, I think, doing the honors of the pantry to yours."

"Doors closed, are they?"

"Surely. You must have something to say to me."

"Of the utmost importance."

"Speak, then."

"It is this. By the way, how is your wife?"

"Very well."

"What the devil was it I heard at Rambouillet?"

"What! was my wife talked about at Rambouillet?"

"They did n't speak of her alone."

"What did they say? I pray to know."

"They say that you have boasted of having left her."

"I have not a very clear idea whether it was I who left her, or she who dismissed me. However, there has been a deed of separation."

"Of what date?"

"This morning."

"And signed?"

"And signed."

"It turns out better than I hoped. There has not yet been time to do anything toward executing the contract."

"In what connection is that remark pertinent?"

"You will take back your wife."

"Take her back?"

"Yes; but we will talk of all that later."

"What! what are you talking about, Pecquigny?"

"That's a minor point. I was wrong; I ought not to have touched upon it. By emphasizing matters of

detail too much, my dear Count, one is apt to obscure the main subject."

"Come, come, let us talk common-sense, if it 's possible."

"Oh, I am most serious. Only, you understand that under present circumstances —"

"What circumstances?"

"Those in which we are placed. This report that you had left the countess —"

"Ah!"

"Don't imagine that I mean to offend you; *pardieu!* no; but, my dear fellow, the countess —"

"Well, what of her?"

"Is virtue itself."

"I am sure of that, Pecquigny."

"Then why leave her?"

"She has a bad disposition."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Indeed it has everything to do with it; it is altogether unbearable to me."

"Apparently, since you have not borne with it."

"It is hateful!"

"Look here, my dear fellow, don't say so many unpleasant things."

"I?"

"It will be more prudent."

"What! more prudent not to speak as I think about my wife?"

"Yes; it may turn up to embarrass you some day when you are compelled to return to her."

"I don't understand you."

"My meaning is very clear, however. I recommend you to be more reserved; if you don't follow my advice, you and I will be likely to have trouble later. But in

the first place, can we be perfectly sure that there is no woman about who can hear what we say?"

"Yes, a thousand times, yes; you may be certain of it."

"The trouble is that what I have to say is not by any means easy to say."

"You alarm me. Does the king know anything?"

"About your wife?"

"About my wife or my mistress either."

"Tell me about your mistress; are you fond of her?"

"To be sure I am."

"Very fond?"

"Passionately."

"The devil! that 's a great pity."

"What! a great pity! a great pity that I love my mistress?"

"Indeed it is; it would be more proper to love your wife."

"That may be; but it 's just because of my love for my mistress that I do not love my wife."

"Is this mistress of whom you are so fond —"

"Olympe de Clèves, yes."

"Olympe de Clèves! Poor fellow! You love her passionately, you say?"

"To distraction."

"Aha!"

Pecquigny rubbed his chin in perplexity.

"Oh, well, so much the better!" he cried suddenly; "the sacrifice will be the more meritorious."

"Sacrifice of what?"

"Of your mistress Olympe."

"To my wife?"

"Oh! who is talking about your wife?"

"To whom do you propose that I should sacrifice Olympe, pray, if not to my wife?"

"Come, come, Count," said Pecquigny, "we must come to the point."

"Most certainly we must."

"Very well! Of course, my dear fellow, you are not in ignorance of the fact that Mademoiselle Olympe de Clèves played 'Junie' the other evening?"

"*Pardieu!* I know it well enough; it was I who brought her back to Paris from Lyons, and was responsible for her début."

"Oh! I think I helped a little in that."

"In what?"

"In arranging for her début."

"Very true. But pray go on. I am on the rack—"

"Well, Olympe acted so charmingly, and is herself so beautiful, that some one fell in love with her over head and ears."

"Some one?"

"Yes."

"What do I care? Unless—" The count looked at Pecquigny. "Unless it should happen to be you?"

"Oh! oh!"

"Listen, Pecquigny! I hasten to tell you this, because you are one of my best friends, and on that account I am anxious not to cause you the least pain. I love Olympe; that word ought to be sufficient. The adverbs with which I might encumber the word would add nothing to the depth of my love; they might rather belittle it, and as I love her, I will not give her up to you."

"My friend, if only myself were in question, you would do well; but—"

"Whom are you talking about, then?" rejoined Mailly, alarmed by Pecquigny's portentous gravity.

"Of some one, my good friend, whom it is not customary to resist in this fair realm of France. I refer, my dear fellow, to the Most Christian King."

"Louis XV.?"

"His Majesty in person."

Monsieur de Mailly turned as white as a ghost.

"The king in love with Olympe!" he exclaimed, raising his head and gazing at Pecquigny like a man just waking from a dream.

"It would seem that our illustrious master is so far gone that he cannot eat or drink. A king who doesn't eat or drink, my friend, has n't long to live. I do not suppose that you will allow your love for your mistress to make you a regicide."

"Listen, Pecquigny!" said the count. "If you are perpetrating one of the jokes that are so popular at court; if you were sent here to annoy me; if Monsieur de Maurepas, who has charge of the police, is paying you for it; if the Jesuits have got possession of you, — why, then it 's all right, and I forgive you; but if you imagine that I am likely to give up Olympe, even to the king, my dear fellow, why, then you are wrong, and I do not forgive you."

"Very fine, very fine! There 's no necessity of loading your eyes up with powder and ball, like pistols, as if we were going to shoot each other with angry looks. Be calm! it 's a serious matter."

"No, it 's very simple. The king loves Olympe, you say? Very good! the king shall not have her. I have Olympe, and I propose to keep her."

"Pshaw!"

"Besides, it is not true."

"What is it that 's not true?"

"The king is not in love with my mistress."

"But I tell you that he is."

"He! a devotee! a prince pickled in sanctity! a model for husbands! Why, it 's impossible!"

"Oho! so you speak ill of the king! *Lèse-majesté!* Beware!"

"It would be a fine thing, would it not, to see me, after I had won a charming creature, a model —"

"Ah, she is indeed a charming creature! Ah, yes, she is a model! You see that the king has not made a mistake. And is Olympe really as charming as you say?"

"Much more charming than I can say."

"You overwhelm me with joy!"

"Are you mad?"

"When you understand me, you will see whether I am behind the seven wise men of Greece in wisdom. So you say then, my dear Mailly, that —"

"She is a very model."

"Upon my honor, you delight my soul. In that case the thing is done."

"What thing?"

"Let me unfold my plan to you."

"You can flatter yourself that you are unfolding things that are very disagreeable to me to hear."

"Dear Count, these disagreeable things are such as cannot escape an honest gentleman, and as an honest gentleman cannot escape. Lugeac, for instance, who had his nose cut off, found it a disagreeable experience; so, too, with Chardin, who was disinherited by his father-in-law, the farmer-general; and then there 's your wife, who was fortunate enough to get rid of you, and will be obliged to take you back again, — that 's exceedingly disagreeable for her."

"Come, do you want me to laugh or get angry? Are you joking or are you ridiculing me?"

"Both; but one after the other. Laugh first; you will lose your temper afterward."

"Enough of this, Pecquigny; cut it short!"

"Oh, no, it is not for me to cut it short to suit you or even to suit myself. I have begun, and I must go on to the end."

"Go on, then; but be quick!"

"I resume the exposition of my plan. Suppose, in the first place, that you are ambitious —"

"Not in the least degree!"

"Let us alone, then! Do you, who are always jumping into fire, like a Basque, mean to tell me that you don't care for decorations and duchies?"

"What has Olympe in common with a duchy, or how can Olympe procure me a decoration?"

"I'm coming to that! I'm coming to that! The king, being in love with this Olympe, and finding her a model, a true model, as you say yourself — Now don't deceive us about that, for just see what a position you would put me in!"

"Look here, Pecquigny! do you know that an idea has come to me while you have been twisting your plan up instead of unfolding it?"

"An idea to you, too! Two ideas! Well, well, this is superb! Speak, my dear Mailly, speak, and see how I will listen!"

"My idea is this; I will not shuffle around the truth as you do. Pecquigny, you were sent here by my wife."

"By your wife?"

"Pecquigny, you are my wife's lover!"

"I! I!"

"Pecquigny, you have explained to me, without suspecting what you were doing, the quarrel my wife

insisted on picking with me. You have shown me why she thinks it necessary that I should return to her. My treaty with her was only signed this morning. Whatever propositions you please for the future, Pecquigny, but not a step backward, — *mordieu*, no!"

"You 're mad; your eyes are coming out of your head, my dear fellow!"

"I don't joke with my own name, Duke, do you hear that?"

"What! You poor fool, who spoke of your name? Who is thinking about your wife, and future propositions, and steps backward? I don't even know your wife; I care less than nothing about your separation, which I never heard of until to-day."

"I believe that, since it dates only from two o'clock."

"Mailly, upon my honor, the countess is not involved in this matter, except secondarily."

"But you demanded that I should be reconciled with her, only a moment ago."

"For your own good, my dear man, so that you might not be left alone after your rupture with poor Olympe. Solitude is a fatal thing for such vivid imaginations as yours, and in such a case one's wife is better than nobody at all."

"Don't imagine, Duke, that I will let you say another word without a word from me."

"What word from you, Count?"

"Duke, I don't mean to threaten you, — we are both too honorable gentlemen and too loyal friends to lose our heads in dealing with each other; but you must swear to me, Duke — "

"What shall I swear?"

"That you do not know my wife, as you say."

"My dear Mailly, the word of a duke for it! I swear to you, by the unsullied honor of my family, my blood, and my race, that I have never seen your wife but three times, — the day of your marriage, when I was your witness, the day of her presentation at court, and to-day at Rambouillet."

"Ah! so Louise was at Rambouillet?"

"Yes; I saw her there, but did not even speak to her. By the way, that reminds me of another little circumstance."

"What was it?"

"Concerning your wife."

"What was it?"

"What concern is it of yours?"

"That depends on what it is."

"Well, suppose it were a very peculiar circumstance?"

"Well, it's no concern of mine, as you say, since we are separated. However, it is proper that a husband — "

"Oh, yes, it is, indeed, very proper. Well, then! do you maintain that the husband — "

"My wife is free."

"Yes; but is she free for one purpose or for all purposes, inclusively or exclusively?"

"I should prefer to say exclusively."

"Exclusively for a duke and peer, for instance, if he be twice duke and twice peer?"

"Pecquigny!"

"Well, man, if it displeases you to have your wife look too much at somebody else, and to have somebody else look too much at her, why, it's high time — "

"High time for what?"

"To put yourself between your wife and the person at whom she is looking."

The count passed his hand over his face.

"Oh, no," said he, "that 's a weak argument. I have a mistress. I know Louise; she may indulge in a little ogling here and there, but that 's all."

"So you believe in your wife, do you?"

"I do."

"Good! My friend, your faith is your salvation."

He added beneath his breath, —

"If Olympe is a model, Mailly is another. What a couple, and what a shame to tear them apart!"

"I have your word, then," continued Mailly, "and I may be sure that your visit here really concerns Olympe?"

"You may depend on it; now for my plan once more!"

"My dear friend, don't go into details; it would be time thrown away."

"Why so?"

"Because it would have no effect."

"Oh, the idea that I could form an impracticable plan!"

"It 's true nevertheless that you have. I have lost my wife's love, or rather it is sleeping and will awake when God pleases."

"Or the devil."

"Have it so, Duke; but as for Olympe, I say again that I propose to cling to her: she is mine, and nothing shall take her from me."

"Mere words! *Verba volant*, as Père Porée used to say."

"You know, my dear Duke, that there are words which are called words of honor, or words as true as the Holy Gospel!"

"Don't get excited, and especially don't run wild about the Gospel! You waste your time."

"How so? Am I not the master of my mistress, in heaven's name?"

"Well, no."

"That 's a strange thing, I should say."

"Strange or not, it 's about so."

"To whom does my mistress belong then, if you please?"

"*Pardieu!* to the king, just as Paris does. When the king chooses to lay a tax upon the city, I don't think he comes to consult you, or the city either, for that matter."

"Very true; but —"

"There is no *but*. Mademoiselle Olympe is an actress, and belongs to the Comédie; the Comédie belongs to the king, for the actors belong to the king's troupe."

"Oh, you 're joking!"

"I joking! 'Pon honor, I 'm a thousand leagues from it."

"Very well! just tell the king to come and take Olympe away from me, and we shall see what we shall see."

Pecquigny shrugged his shoulders.

"The king is very likely to put himself out of the way to come here, is he not?"

"Pecquigny, you are a precious friend. I appreciate all your delicacy; you see the danger which threatens me, and are anxious to save me from it."

"How?"

"You know that there is a conspiracy against poor Olympe, and you are giving me notice of it without seeming to do so."

"A conspiracy!"

"That 's all right, don't deny it; it is noble of you, and I am very grateful. This very night I will set out

with her for my little estate in Normandy. You know it is near Courbe-Épine, which belongs to Madame de Prie."

"It is my turn to thank you for forewarning me. You may be sure that Mademoiselle Olympe will not go to Normandy."

"The devil!" said Mailly, in utter amazement. "Pray, why will she not go?"

"Because I will prevent her."

"You?"

"Myself. You understand, my dear Count, I have no wish to kill the king with disappointment, and then go and take my place beside Jacques Clément and Ravaillac."

"This is very fine, upon my word!"

"If it were your wife, my dear Mailly, I don't say that I would authorize you, but I would advise you, to hide her; for in such case it would be a theft on his Majesty's part, although there is a precedent in the case of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan. But a mistress —"

"Duke!"

"Yes, I mean it."

"You! My friend!"

"Your friend when off duty; but in this matter, my dear fellow, I am on the king's business."

"You conspire to rob me of the woman I love."

"Pshaw! a mere actress!"

"But if the king wants her, why should not I want her as well as he?"

"The king, my dear, is the king."

"Do you mean to drive me to desperation?

"If I should see you in desperation over this, it would make me laugh."

"You have gone altogether too far, Duke, and I think it's high time to have done with it."

Pecquigny rose.

"I thought you a man of spirit," said he.

"Yes, and without heart."

"Here for an hour I have been twisting and turning and lying, and laying traps, and springing mines —"

"And all for what end?"

"Why, you know very well."

"To spirit Olympe away, yes."

"*Dame!* if the king orders me to do it, it is less difficult than to carry a bastion."

"Pecquigny, in the bastions you have stormed you found Spaniards or Germans."

"While by Olympe's side I shall find you; is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"My dear fellow, that will be a source of grief to me; but I shall swallow my grief, and having swallowed it, I shall carry the bastion. You know my theory about disagreeable occurrences."

"Listen, Pecquigny, one last word."

"Go on."

"Suppose Olympe loves me!"

"You talk nothing but nonsense, you have degenerated since our interview began. All that I have heard from you is a farrago of horrible platitudes. Suppose Olympe loves you, you say? Well, *pardieu!* suppose she does love you. What does that matter?"

"You ask, what does that matter?"

"To be sure; I return to my comparison. Do the taxes love the king? Yet they are the king's. If Mademoiselle Olympe does not love the king, will she be likely to tell his Majesty that she hates him?"

"Yes, she will indeed."

"Well, my dear fellow, that would be a vulgar piece of folly, and I believe her incapable of it. She will never say that to the king, because she has a sense of propriety, and the king deserves to be loved. He's a charming fellow, is the king! If you had only seen him this evening! He is much handsomer than you, and much younger too; and then he is king, which counts for something. A woman who would not love the king! For shame! A woman! Look here, man, your arguments are all against common-sense! This passion of the king's for an actress will not last forever. *Mordieu!* if you are so wild over this Olympe, you can take her back again!"

"Oh, that's a shameful thing to say to me!"

"You have acted a thousand times worse than I have talked. Let us sum up."

"It is all summed up. I refuse."

"Very good. Let me pass then; I propose to go and speak to the lady herself."

Mailly threw himself in front of the duke, to bar his way.

"Speak of these infamous things to Olympe!" he cried. "Never, Duke, never!"

"If I don't speak to her to-day, I shall to-morrow; that's all."

"Never, under my roof!"

"If not under your roof, it will be elsewhere, — at the Comédie, for instance."

"I will kill you first."

"If you kill me, Mailly, I shall bequeath to some friend this plan of mine which you refuse to consent to. My friend will follow it up, and you will be compelled to kill him also, to prevent him from speaking to your Olympe."

"Then I will kill her."

"Pshaw! from nonsense you pass to downright absurdity. You will be like the Roman Virginius, a gentleman who killed his daughter. Very fine that! but Virginius killed his daughter, not his mistress; and then Appius Claudius was a wicked decemvir, a fiendish tyrant, while Louis XV. is a fascinating monarch."

"What matters it to me?"

"Faith, it does matter to you, and you shall see how. The king will think you mad after so many murders, and will have you shut up in the Bastille, and there you will rot, writing sonnets on the wall in praise of your mistress. Consider if you would n't better draw in your horns. There, I have sketched the position in few words. Now listen."

"Good God! I have listened far too much already."

"The king is in love with a woman. What do you say to that?"

"Nothing; it 's all the same to me."

"That woman is your neighbor's wife. What do you say to that?"

"Why —"

"You have nothing to say, have you? Better still, if it were the wife of your friend Pecquigny, for example, you would laugh about it as gayly as a lot of flies playing in the sun. Come, admit these two points, for heaven's sake!"

"Very good; but the woman whom the king loves is my mistress, not your wife."

"Well! do you expect to prevent other people from laughing?"

"No; but I have no inclination to laugh myself."

"What does that matter? Those other people will lend a hand to the king, as it is natural for good French-

men to do. The king has a natural fascination, and in default of that fascination, which is irresistible, there is the Bastille, — Bastille for Olympe if she is stubborn; Bastille for Mailly if he rebels against his Majesty; Bastille to the right, Bastille to the left, Bastille everywhere. My good friend, I have talked too much; my throat is scorched. During this long interview you have n't so much as offered me a bit of refreshment, except in the shape of a sword-thrust."

"Oh, pardon me, my dear Duke."

"Yes, I understand, it is hard; but even the satisfaction of administering a sword-thrust may lead to the Bastille. Always the Bastille! A devilish pleasant prospect! Look here! it used to be said that the Pyramids were the highest structure in the world. I swear to you that it is false, for they can't be seen ten leagues away, while that infernal Bastille can be seen everywhere. It is entitled to be called the loftiest structure in the world."

Mailly was plunged in deep despondency.

"Oh, all my beautiful dreams!" he muttered; "all vanished, lost!"

"Nonsense! Have you never noticed that when one dream is ended, another one almost always begins, when one is a good sleeper? Come, have you made up your mind?"

"To leave Olympe? Never!"

"To let me broach the subject to her?"

"Never, never!"

"Very well, my friend. We are enemies now, without abandoning that loyalty of conduct which is inseparable from enmities between Frenchmen. I ought to say one thing to you, however — "

"Say it, and say it again and again, you will never move me by one hair's breadth."

"Yes, I see that, and so I will add but one thing."

"What is it?"

"It is this,— that since this is a woman's affair, strategy is indispensable, and I am too much your friend not to make use of whatever is indispensable. Instead of using force I will use the wiles of the serpent. Be suspicious of everything,— doors, windows, and trap-doors; I shall employ whatever means comes to hand, and if you don't want to be made a fool of, if you don't want to play Cassandra with Olympe while I am making her play Isabelle, be on your guard! Once more, my dear Mailly, be on your guard! I, Pecquigny, your friend, your true friend, and your foe at the same time, bid you beware!"

With these words the captain took his leave without having so much as put his lips to the glass which Monsieur de Mailly had filled when Pecquigny reproached him for letting him die of thirst.

XI.

THE SHADOW WAS A BODY.

It was late, or rather it was very early, when his Majesty Louis XV.'s Captain of the Guards took his departure from the secret establishment of Monsieur de Mailly.

Six o'clock was striking in the neighboring church-tower; the first rays of dawn were beginning to appear, ushering in one of those gray autumn days which begin in mist and end in fog. A sharp, piercing air gave promise of a fine midday. It was during that midday that the king with his entire household was to return from Rambouillet.

Daylight was beginning to peer in at the windows of the dining-room when Mailly roused himself from the stupor in which Pecquigny's scheme had plunged him.

The fire was out, and the servants were either dozing in their chairs or in bed.

Mailly shook his head as if to drive away the clouds which the duke had thrown over his faculties, and went upstairs to Olympe's apartment.

He expected to find her in bed and asleep; but she was sitting upon her sofa, with her feet stretched out toward a fire that was hardly a spark, while the dying candles were sputtering in the rich candelabra.

Olympe was not asleep, and her eyes were wide open.

This was another blow for Mailly.

He looked closely at her, and was struck with the change in her face.

"Already up?" he said.

Olympe, who had not stirred at the noise the Count made in entering, slowly turned her head.

"Not yet in bed, you should say."

"You have not been in bed?"

"No."

"Why not?" cried Mailly. "*Mon Dieu!* Olympe, are you ill?"

"No, I am not ill."

"Then why did n't you go to bed?"

"I did not go to bed because you did not order me to," said she.

"Order you?" echoed Mailly.

"Yes, I was afraid of displeasing you; are you not my protector?"

Mailly's arms fell powerless at his sides, and his head fell forward on his chest.

"Oh!" he groaned, "cruel, cruel woman that you are, have you not done enough to convince me that you look upon me as a tyrant?"

Olympe made no reply.

"But you can't love me any more, Olympe," he cried, in tones which witnessed the sincerity of his passion. "Oh, I do love you *so* dearly!"

"Henri," said she, "you pay no heed to the wound in my heart, which is still open; be careful of it, I beg you."

"What wound?"

Olympe smiled bitterly.

"Oh!" cried Mailly, as if struck for the first time by the thought; "I tremble to believe that I understand you."

"I told you not to probe it, Count."

"You have preserved your love — for — "

"Don't say another word."

"You still love this Bannière?"

"Count, don't say that, so long as I don't say it."

"On the contrary, let us say it, Olympe. You love that fellow, that actor, that soldier?"

"What matters it whether I love him or love him not, since he no longer loves me?"

Mailly was on the point of crying, "But he does still love you; he is in Paris, he is seeking you," when it came home to him that of all his rivals he was the most formidable, and that he must allow Olympe to believe that he was far from her.

"Olympe," said he, "without you life seems impossible to me; without you there is no hope for me on earth. Oh, Olympe, do not take away your love, for it would be equivalent to taking away my life!"

"Yes, I believe that you love me."

"Well, then, if you believe that I love you, Olympe, for God's sake, tell me that you love me, — not only that you love me, but that you prefer me to all the world, and that you will suffer no homage from any other than myself. Oh, I do need to have you tell me that, and be gentle with me! My life, yes, my very life is hanging by that one thread."

"To make you happy without being happy myself, — is that what you ask? Strictly speaking, it is possible, I suppose."

"If it is possible, do it for me."

"Selfish love!"

"Like all loves."

"Count," said Olympe, "I will force myself to make you happy."

"But listen! that is not all."

"What else is there? Tell me."

"It may be that obstacles will be interposed to prevent your carrying out your kind intentions toward me, dearest."

"What kind of obstacles?"

"Suppose that a power higher than mine seeks to dispute my right to you?"

"To dispute your right to me?"

"Yes."

"With force?"

"With force, — that is to say, against my will."

"And against my will too?"

"As for that, I am unable to say, Olympe."

"Who, then, would dare to ask a woman for the love which she cannot give him?"

"How do I know?"

"The man who would do that would be the lowest of mankind."

"Or the highest."

Olympe gazed earnestly at Mailly.

"Aha!" she exclaimed.

"Do you understand?"

"Perhaps."

"So much the better, if you do, and can spare me the grievous necessity of going into details."

"I played 'Britannicus' the other day, did I not?"

"You are on the right track, Olympe."

"And a certain person thought me fair?"

"That 's it."

"And that person is more powerful than you?"

"More powerful than I; you are quite right."

"That person — is it the king?"

"It is the king."

Olympe shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, Count," said she, "what matters it to you?"

"Olympe, it is the torture of my life. The king is handsome, amiable, and young."

"The king, being young, will give his sanction to no violence. It would need a Nero to poison Britannicus and take Junie away by force."

"Yes, but suppose that Junie loves Nero?"

"Suppose that Junie loves Nero, if you please, but do not imagine that Olympe loves Louis XV."

"But if they should employ —"

"What?"

"Fear."

"Fear?"

"Suppose they should threaten you with the Bastille?"

"Count, in my present situation, nothing would be more sweet to me than absolute captivity, except absolute independence."

"Olympe, don't blame me any more for keeping you close, and hiding you from all eyes. You see now that I was right, and yet from this moment you are free."

"So they want to take me away from you?"

"That announcement has been made to me."

"Is there anything in my power which will set your mind at rest?"

"One assurance."

"Name it."

"Your word that you will never yield to fear."

"What you ask is altogether too easy."

"Then you will not yield —"

"To aught but love."

"There, you see you say in advance that you will eventually love the king."

"I do not say and do not think that I shall ever love the king."

"Oh, yes, you will love him, I tell you."

"You see, yourself, that all my oaths are of no avail, and give you no sort of security; so let yourself go with the tide."

Mailly threw himself at her feet.

"My love," he cried, "my only treasure, I am going to look at you for a long while,— I am going to accustom myself to the thought that you have been mine, that you have been mine alone, and I shall end by believing that you will always be mine."

"Ah, how we fall back into our illusions, Count!"

"Olympe, you are cruel!"

"No, I am outspoken. You know that I fainted yesterday?"

"Alas! yes."

"Well, as I recovered from my swoon, it seemed as if I had left one world and entered another. The world which I left was the world of illusions; that which I entered was the world of realities. What am I? where am I going? Why all this delicacy? I have already changed masters once; perhaps I shall change again. I am a treasure, and treasures sometimes are stolen."

"Olympe! Olympe!"

"And, don't you see, perhaps this is a means."

"A means?"

"Yes, a means of loving you. If the king steals me from you, why — why — I am sure that he will no sooner have stolen me than I shall find that I love you dearly."

"Olympe, you tear my heart!"

"I?"

"Yes, you are one of those terrible women who always love the lovers whom they have lost."

"Do you think that?" she said with a start.

"Yes, I do."

"Then keep me away from just one man."

"Bannière?"

"Yes."

"Do you love him?"

"Yes."

"But you told me at Lyons that you loved him no longer."

"I thought I did not."

"Unhappy woman!"

"Unhappy, indeed; for I love him still."

"You love an actor!"

"I am an actress."

"You love a gambler!"

"He gambled to win money for me."

"You love a man who betrayed you!"

Olympe's face grew dark, and her lips were tightly closed.

"And for whom?" continued Mailly; "for an unworthy rival."

"Hold, Monsieur," said Olympe, "forbear to speak of that, I beg you, and we shall get along much better."

"Why so?"

"Because the more I think of it, the more I am inclined to believe that there was some treachery in that whole business."

"Of course there was; but Monsieur Bannière was the traitor."

"He swore to me in that prison that he was innocent."

"Bah! a man of his sort always will swear to anything."

"Bannière was an honorable man, Count."

"Olympe! Olympe!"

"You see that I was right when I said to you, 'Do not speak of Bannière.'"

"What does it matter if we speak of him, so long as you are thinking of him?"

"I can govern my words, Count; but I have not learned how to control my thoughts."

"And your thoughts?"

"Go back, in spite of me, to that cell where he grovelled at my feet, saying, 'I am innocent, Olympe; I am innocent, and I will prove it to you.'"

"Did he prove it?"

"No; but suppose he should?"

"Well, if he should prove it, what would happen? Tell me."

"King Louis XV. would not be the man for you to fear, Count."

"It would be Bannière?"

"Yes."

"Oh, you are right, Olympe; let us talk of something else."

"I am always right."

"Then guide me, command me. What shall we do?"

"What shall we do?"

"Yes; tell me."

"Well, Count, let us have breakfast, as we were so foolish as to go without supper last night; then, taking life as I find it, I think I will go to sleep, after breakfast, having been silly enough not to sleep last night."

Mailly took Olympe in his arms.

"Very well," said he; "so be it! Let us live from day to day; and when you see how much you are to me, my Olympe! why, then you will have pity on me, and will strive to preserve your love and yourself for me."

"I will do my best," she replied.

At two o'clock in the afternoon Mailly was still asleep, and dreaming that Olympe's heart was his, and his alone.

The dream was too lovely to last very long

His valet knocked at his door and awakened him.

"What is it now?" asked Mailly; "why do you disturb me?"

"Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu absolutely insists upon speaking with Monsieur le Comte," said the valet.

"The Duc de Richelieu! on what subject?"

"The king's service, he says."

"Oh, the devil!" said Mailly, leaping out of bed; "say that I will be with him at once."

XII

HE MAILLY IN SEARCH OF HIS WIFE

Monsieur le Duc de Richelieu was, in fact, waiting to see the ogress, as the valet had said.

The greeting between them was cordial upon both sides, as became polished gentlemen. Mailly was not the man to show himself to be so put out by his interview with Pompignan as to receive with discourtesy the franked and most affable nobleman of the age.

They embraced each other, as the custom was.

"Can you spare me a half-hour of your time, my dear Count?" said the duke, after these preliminaries were satisfactorily concluded.

"Well, Duke, you know that here —"

"Yes, this is the abode of pleasure and not of business, I know."

"You come on business, then, do you?"

"Yes, and most urgent business too."

"But you see —"

"That you are with your mistress?"

"Precisely."

"*Mon Dieu!* I am terribly sorry to disturb you."

"But after all, Duke —"

"Well?"

"If it is absolutely essential?"

"It is absolutely essential."

"In that case I am at your service. Where do you prefer that an interview should take place?"

"If I can have my choice, I should like very much to take a walk somewhere."

"We have the garden."

"That will suit me admirably."

"This way, then."

Mailly led his visitor through the dining-room where he had received Pecquigny, and they descended a flight of steps, bordered with superb flowers sheltered under glass, into the garden, which was left desolate and bare by the first frosts; and yet one could still imagine, even in these first days of winter, what it had been, and what it would be again with the return of the balmy days of May.

It was a long rectangle, with a row of tall sycamores near the wall, from whose branches the frost had already begun to hang its sharp stalactites.

"Now, Monsieur le Duc, we are quite as secluded as you seem to wish that we should be. Speak then; I am ready to listen. It would seem that you come as an official messenger?"

"'Pon my soul! I am something of that sort, my dear Count; so allow me to congratulate you on your perspicacity."

The two men gravely saluted each other.

"Do you know that you have a delightful little place here, Count?"

"Coming from you, Monsieur le Duc, the praise is doubly flattering."

"It must be a lovely bird who is worthy of such a lovely cage."

"Duke!"

"However, if rumor does not exaggerate, it appears that your mistress is the pearl of pearls. In what waters did you plunge to secure such a treasure?"

"The devil!" thought Mailly; "has he got his eye on Olympe too?"

He smiled as he said,—

"You spoke of an official message, Duke; are you changing your residence?"

"What do you mean?"

"After being accredited to the great house of Austria, are you now intrusted with a mission to the little house on Rue Grange-Batelière?"

"Why, your guessing is marvellously accurate, my dear Count! this is your day, upon my word!"

"Yes," said Mailly to himself,—"yes, he is going to ask me for Olympe too."

He began to brace himself for another struggle.

"Monsieur le Duc," said he, aloud, "my penetration goes even deeper than you suppose."

"Indeed!" said Richelieu.

"For I have not only detected in you an ambassador, but I have divined the object of your embassy."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes; but I warn you of one thing."

"What is that?"

"That I am ill-disposed toward your mission."

"Oho!" said the duke, in surprise.

"Yes, I was approached on this subject very recently; and the interview was as disagreeable to me as anything could well be, I assure you."

"You have been approached?"

"Yes, and very frankly and forcibly too."

"Would it be indiscreet to ask by whom, Count?"

"No, faith! especially since by my way of receiving him—"

"Well?"

"I cured him of any desire to come again."

"Still you don't tell me the name of this officious meddler."

"Oh! he is a friend of mine."

"Pecquigny, perhaps?" said the duke, at a venture.

"The same!" cried Mailly; "how did you know that?"

"Pecquigny! Deuce take him!" muttered the duke; "the damned courtier got the start of me." He added aloud: "And you refused to listen to him?"

"On the contrary, I heard him to the end. It was then that, having no further room for doubt, I dismissed him in a way to let him see that it would be most unpleasant for me to have him return."

"But perhaps, my dear Count," said Richelieu, in his most insinuating tone, "he did not present all the arguments in their most favorable light?"

"Oh, indeed! with all your eloquence, Monsieur le Duc, I doubt whether you could surpass Pecquigny; he was far ahead of Demosthenes."

"Let us talk it over, I beg, Monsieur le Comte," said Richelieu; "and, in order that we may do so satisfactorily, pray do not confound my suggestions with Pecquigny's. I am your friend."

"Pecquigny began with precisely the same assurance. You alarm me, Monsieur le Duc; for it is to his friendship that I attribute his remarkable eloquence."

"Eloquent as he was, I hope to say some things to you that he forgot."

"You may try."

"First of all, let us clear up one matter."

"Go on, and clear it up, Duke."

"It is a good thing to know where we start from, is n't it?"

"To be sure."

"In the first place, it is almost certain that you have left Madame de Mailly, have you not?"

"What! is it already known?"

"It is public property."

"Upon my word, she has lost no time."

"She or you?"

"She."

"It matters little; in any event, the thing was done extraordinarily well."

"That is known too!" cried Mailly, not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"Believe me, my dear Count, if I had not known it, I should not have shown myself here."

"Oh, yes, of course," said Mailly.

"Why of course?" asked Richelieu.

"You are laying out your plan of attack."

"What do you mean?" Mailly shook his head with a very knowing look. "I don't understand," said Richelieu.

"I understand, if you don't," said Mailly.

"Does it mean that the rupture with Madame de Mailly is a serious one?"

"It means that I give you *carte blanche*, Monsieur le Duc; henceforth Madame de Mailly and I are strangers."

"You have a way of saying that, my dear Count —"

"In what way did I say it, pray?"

"In a way to make me think that you regret the fact."

"I do not regret it, — no, Duke; and yet she has some excellent qualities."

"She is charming!"

"Oh, don't praise her too highly to me, I beg you."

"Why not?"

"Because, after all is said and done, I am her husband."

"Well, because you're her husband, does it follow that you ought to be insensible to the worth of a most lovable wife?"

"Did I not say to you a moment ago, Monsieur le Duc, that she had some excellent qualities?"

"Which did not prevent you, however, from giving her her liberty. But, *dame!* I can imagine that."

"What! you can imagine it?"

"To be sure, when one has a mistress like yours!"

"Damnation!" thought Mailly; "here he comes back to Olympe!"

"Well, upon my word!" said he, "can it be that you have already found time to make the acquaintance of my wife and my mistress, although you only returned from Vienna three or four days ago?"

"Of your wife, yes; of your mistress, no; but yesterday, in a very good place, I heard it said that she was a lovely creature."

"At Rambouillet?"

"Nowhere else; how did you know?"

"Did I not tell you that I have had a visit from Pecquigny?"

"True; in fact, it was he who said it."

"To whom?"

"To the king, I believe."

Mailly stamped upon the ground.

"Aha!" said Richelieu, "I infer that common report does not exaggerate?"

"As to whom?"

"As to Mademoiselle Olympe, of course. Is not that the name of your mistress? They say that she is beautiful."

"Very beautiful!"

"And instinct with grace."

"She is a perfect fairy."

"And talented withal."

"She is an artist of the first rank."

"And she loves you?"

"What the devil is there remarkable about that?"

"Nothing, *morbleu!* you are a charming cavalier, and I but asked you a simple question."

"Does it interest you, then, whether Olympe does or does not love me?"

"Tremendously."

"Well, then, Duke, she does love me."

"And how about yourself, — do you love her?"

"It is an absurd thing to say, Duke, I know; but — but — I worship her, that's the truth."

"So that nothing could separate you from her?"

"Nothing."

"No future prospect, howsoever brilliant it might be, could prevail upon you to give her up?"

"Not only could nothing induce me to give her up, but if any one should undertake to steal her from me — "

"What would you do?"

"*Dame!* I would kill him who should undertake the commission for another, were he my best friend, were he my brother, were it yourself, Duke!"

"Your hand!" said Richelieu, holding out his own.

"My hand, do you say?"

"You make me the happiest man on earth."

"By telling you that I love my mistress, and that my mistress loves me; that I would refuse to give her up to you, yes, to the king himself?"

"How fortunate that is!" cried the duke.

"Why is it fortunate, pray? You are keeping me on the rack, my dear Duke."

"Why, because it removes all my conscientious scruples."

"You had scruples, then?"

"Indeed I did, my dear Count; you understand, as you just said yourself, a husband is always a husband, unless he has ceased to be one — as you have — in which event — why — "

"Well?"

"Why, one may venture to speak to him about his wife."

"What! do you want to speak about my wife?"

"To be sure, as I came for no other purpose; that is what embarrasses me."

"*Pardieu!* Duke," rejoined Mailly, "I would be very glad to know which of us is the more embarrassed of the two."

"Clearly I am," said the duke; "the proof of it is that here have I been beating about the bush for an hour without knowing where to begin."

"Do you wish me to help you?"

"*Pardieu!* that would be more than kind, my dear Count!"

"Oh, it's very easy; you saw Madame de Mailly yesterday at Rambouillet, and found her to your liking. You know that I have a mistress, and you wanted, like a good fellow, to make sure that I had no wife."

"Faith, that's about it. But who the devil told you?"

"I have my sources of information; now go on."

"Really, my dear Count, no one is so clever as you: yes, I have designs upon Madame de Mailly; yes, she is the person whom I must have, and I do not despair of convincing you — "

"Ah, this is too much!" cried Mailly, laughing uproariously, but with a violence which proved that his

heart was not in his merriment: "you come here and ask my permission to take my wife from me!"

"Would you prefer, my dear Count, that I should come like a villain, or one of these vile imitators of the regency, and steal her from you without so much as a 'by your leave,' in the shadow of your separation still only half known? Fie! fie! that would be terribly vulgar! Would you like me to explain to you, Count, why most of my missions have been successful? It is because, since there must always be two parties to a negotiation, I always try not to surprise my adversary; I win his good-will by my straightforwardness, and then vanquish him by my logic."

"All this means," cried the count, "that you expect to convince me that it is right for me to leave Madame de Mailly to you?"

"I certainly count upon it."

"Do you mean it?"

"Except for that I most assuredly would not have intruded upon you."

"Good, very good!" cried Mailly, somewhat brightened up by the turn affairs had taken; "prove it, prove it, my dear Duke, and if you convince me of it, I shall consider you, whom I know to have been thus far unconquered, unconquerable."

"To begin with, you no longer care for your wife, do you?"

"I admit it; she has a fearful disposition."

"For you."

"Ah! but you see it was for myself that I took her, my dear Duke."

"Now you are speaking ill of Madame de Mailly."

"Why should you want me to speak well of her?"

"Count, be serious, I beg of you," said the duke. "I

swear to you that it 's worth while; and since Pecquigny has spoken to you, you ought to realize the situation."

"Let us come to details, Duke."

"Well, then, I think it essential that you should not seem to take notice of what is going on. A sacrifice which one is bound to make is not compromising in the eyes of the world; and besides there are two reasons why you should make it: first, the king's will which one cannot resist — "

"That 's just the way Pecquigny talked."

"Oh, the corrupter! Secondly, the best reason of all which your good angel himself could furnish."

"What is that? "

"Incompatibility, my dear Duke, — incompatibility of temper."

"I beg your pardon."

"I said incompatibility. Don't you see what a lucky chance it was that this separation should come just at the very moment when we had need of it? "

"What separation? "

"Why, between you and your wife."

Mailly looked at the duke.

"Upon my soul," said he, "I fail to see what our separation has to do with this business."

"Very well, Count, did I not say to you that Pecquigny did not present all the arguments? What! do you mean to tell me that it is anything short of miraculous that you and your wife on the very same day, without premeditation or scandal, should have signed that little document, which makes you safe from ridicule and her from the charge of infidelity? "

"Upon my honor, Duke," cried Mailly, "I still fail to understand you."

"You alarm me; pray let me explain then."

"Oh, I shall be exceedingly obliged to you, for you and Pecquigny between you will drive me out of my wits."

"Well, then, what would the world have said if this fortunate separation had not preceded the step which I am now taking? — 'Monsieur de Mailly is an ambitious fellow.'"

"Ambitious?"

"'Madame de Mailly sacrifices her husband, who is only a count, to the king because he is king.'"

"To the king!" cried Mailly, losing color.

"Why, yes, to the king of course."

"What! my wife?"

"Well?"

"The king is after her?"

"Most assuredly."

"And you?"

"What about me?"

"You come in the king's behalf?"

"In whose behalf do you suppose I come, in heaven's name? I am an ambassador of France, and France — is the king. The deuce take me, my dear Count, but when one's name is Richelieu, one attends to nobody's business but the king's or one's own."

Mailly was speechless, stupefied; an unfamiliar prospect, of which he had never dreamed, opened out before him. Wholly absorbed by thoughts of his mistress, he had believed until that moment that it was she who was the object of the duke's mission.

"The king in love with my wife!" he muttered at last, recovering from his stupefaction.

"Well!" cried Richelieu, "one would say that
lling from the clouds. Here I have been
same song in ten different keys for half an

"Oh, Duke! Duke!" muttered Mailly, "is this really true?"

"Why, haven't you been listening to me, for God's sake?"

"My wife! the king loves my wife!"

Richelieu nodded his head affirmatively.

"Why, it can't be so!" suddenly exclaimed Mailly.

"Why not, pray?"

"Because this very morning Pecquigny told me just the reverse. You are inventing this, Duke."

"Inventing it! God forbid!"

"Yes, inventing it."

"For what purpose, pray?"

"For the purpose of taking my wife from me."

"Come, come, Count!" retorted Richelieu; "what sort of infernal nonsense is that? Is this the way they talk at Paris since I went away? Invent! I invent anything! Did you make such a charge as that? My dear Count, you are wandering."

"Oh, Pecquigny! Pecquigny!"

"Well, tell me what he told you."

"He told me that it was Olympe, my mistress, whom the king was after."

"Do you mean it?"

Richelieu laughed heartily.

"That amuses you, Duke, does it?" said Mailly, all ready to lose his temper.

"Indeed it does."

"May I ask why?"

"Because it is excruciatingly funny. But, after all, suppose it were so?"

"The king in love with two women?"

"He is quite capable of it, Count."

"I implore you not to joke thus."

"But it may well be that he will take both of them from you, my poor Count."

"Ah! Duke, you must, in fairness, agree with me that it's an intolerable position for me."

"Upon my word, it is an extraordinary state of things."

"Olympe, whom I love so dearly!"

"Well, let your wife go, then."

"Madame de Mailly, who bears my name!"

"Then let your mistress go."

"Duke, I am a lost man; all Paris will make sport of me: here you are beginning already."

"God forbid, my dear Count; on the contrary, I bring you my deepest sympathy and friendship."

"Advise me, then."

"Oh, pshaw! now you are laughing at me."

"How so?"

"Does one advise people in your condition, — people who are in love and selfish?"

"You came here for some purpose, Duke."

"*Dame!* I thought I had already told you often enough why I came."

"Tell me once more."

"Very well; I came to offer you a means of escaping ridicule."

"Give it to me quickly."

"I came to say to you: 'Your wife is sought by the king: you never loved your wife; your wife no longer loves you. Make haste.'"

"I am to make haste?"

"Yes."

"To do what?"

"Why, to imitate Monsieur de Montespan, who ·hout his life was feared by the king, hoodwinked ·ife, and esteemed by everybody."

"Duke! Duke! that is a downright infamous proposition!"

"Are you mad, my dear fellow? Why, it 's supreme good-fortune, on the other hand; it is what is called drawing a cover, or holding the enemy for ransom."

"I should be glad, Duke, to see things from your standpoint."

"I will prove what I say. If you hesitate, the king will begin by attacking you in a weak spot, just as they do in laying siege to a town. He will take away your mistress first, and everybody will approve, on the score of morality."

"You say that everybody will approve?"

"Faith, yes; for everybody loves to laugh, do they not? The king, weary of your mistress, passes on to your wife; he steals her away also, and finds that operation the more easy, because allowing herself to be stolen she plays you a twofold trick. The result of it all is that you find yourself beaten by your mistress and your wife both, and all the world looks on at the spectacle; for there will be no spectator who will not long to witness the second act, after he has seen the first."

"Hold, Duke, this is frightful!"

"But true! Have your wits about you, on the other hand. Assume a sarcastic smile. Make your choice; reject the chaff, and select the good grain; in the tempest which threatens to overwhelm everything, cast an anchor to windward. Emerge from it a duke and peer, a knight in the royal orders; obtain a promise of a lucrative government, or the government itself, if possible, and see how everybody will laugh with you instead of laughing *at* you."

"Impossible! Impossible!"

"You are losing your senses! Do you love your mistress?"

"I am mad with love of her!"

"Do you love your wife?"

"I know not."

"Oh, the devil! faltering and turning back already! Weak, feeble creature that you are! Have you or have you not abandoned your wife?"

"Almost."

"Well, then, your abandoned wife will have her revenge."

"Perhaps."

"She will have her revenge, I tell you. Why, in God's name, do you suppose that any exception will be made in your favor? If she doesn't take her revenge with the king, she will with somebody else, and then good-by to the duchy, good-by to the peerage, good-by to the decoration, good-by to the government; you will have been a cuckold for nothing! Upon my soul, my dear Count, I cannot comprehend how a man of spirit, having such a lovely mistress as you have, and embarrassed by his wife as you are by yours, can help thanking heaven for sending him an opportunity for freedom."

"But freedom in such a case is rank dishonor!"

"Fine words, fine words! Suppose your wife loves the king, Monsieur; then prevent this dishonor, if you can!"

"Suppose my wife loves the king?"

"Why should she not? Is this Louis XV. young or old, ugly or handsome, king or shepherd? Is not the king worth more than you and I and all the rest?"

"Oh, Pecquigny again!" muttered the count.

"This which you don't choose to do with the advantage all on your side, you will be forced to submit to. Then you 'll see, you 'll see!"

"Duke, this is enough to drive a man mad!"

"No, Monsieur, it is a simple matter of protecting yourself. If you were reasonable, your choice would not be long in doubt."

Mailly buried his face in his hands.

Richelieu gazed pityingly at him, as the haughty victor gazes at his enemy at his feet.

"I came," said he, "to tell you a piece of good news. and to keep you informed as to what is going on; you take the thing altogether wrong, so let's talk no more about it."

"Do you know that all this you are saying to me is insulting?" cried Mailly, raising his head.

"Take care," said Richelieu, "lest you provoke me so far that I resent it. I am his Majesty's ambassador, and must maintain the honor of the crown."

"Like Pecquigny still again!" shouted the poor fellow; "like Pecquigny!"

He rested his head against the marble pedestal of a statue.

The duke evidently had led him to the point where he wished to lead him; for he took advantage of the unhappy count's momentary prostration to turn upon his heel and disappear.

XIII.

MAILLY IS AGITATED.

It is easier to imagine than to describe Mailly's suffering after Richelieu's departure.

Lover and husband, he saw mistress and wife equally threatened. The wife is never of any value to the faithless husband until he sees that other eyes have distinguished her; but at that moment the wife represents to him property, name, honor, everything.

At that moment what a priceless treasure is that same wife, and how brilliantly shines all that had been disdained, how reasons for loving return with reasons for hating!

In an instant Monsieur de Mailly flew from one extreme to the other. He saw in his fancy his wife, whom he had left alone and desperate, — he saw her flattered and courted, enveloped in clouds of incense. He felt a sharp pang at his heart.

"Abandon my wife!" he said to himself; "abandon my property to him who has no claim to aught but my life! Never!"

Then he checked himself.

"But," he thought, "these artisans of intrigue and corruption have themselves told me that the king is kind, that he will not want to take away his all from an unhappy gentleman. Of the two objects which he vets he will go without one, so as to leave something : Monsieur de Mailly. A very model of continence

and virtue is the king! A veritable Scipio or Alexander!"

Happy Mailly, go to! The king will take from you only your wife or your mistress. It is for you to choose the one which it pleases you to allow him to take, — your wife if you choose, your mistress if you choose. What noble generosity! After all, why should you have a wife and a mistress at one and the same time? It is a surplusage at which morality rebels.

And then the king, reared by Monsieur de Fleury, is *so* moral! There is no patriarch in France but his Majesty. The king alone can maintain a harem in France, if he please. You have a mistress who loves you, and a wife whom you think you ought to love. No, no! the king will prove to you that it is too much; he will prove it, perhaps by the Bastille, perhaps by Vincennes, or by some other means equally agreeable.

He will prove it by sending the Captains of the Guards to you, armed with long swords.

He will prove it by sending you his cleverest diplomatists arrayed in their armor of protocols and subtleties.

He will prove it by exile.

He will prove it as David proved it to Uriah for Bathsheba.

He has not only the example of Louis XIV. in his favor, but of King David too.

In the first affair against Spaniards or Austrians, you will be assigned a place so well chosen that a furnace will open beneath your feet, as happened to Monsieur de Beaufort before Candia.

Or perhaps you will be killed by a Spanish chasseur fighting manfully, face to face, and braving the ordinary chances of war.

Or you may receive a ball in the loins from one of

your own grenadiers, — a deplorable piece of awkwardness which will bring tears to the eyes of sensitive folk, who read the gazettes.

Mailly! Mailly! it 's a serious crisis!

It is especially serious because it demonstrates the possession of unruly passions by this young prince whom all France, with one accord, calls the "well beloved."

"Poor France! What will happen when she knows him better! His own wife, my wife, and my mistress! Marie Leczinska, Madame la Comtesse de Mailly, and Olympe de Clèves, all for a young man in his teens! Serious, indeed, it is!"

Yes, Mailly, it is a serious matter; and what will it be when he is thirty years old, and when he is sixty?

How many people at such a time have closed their eyes, as the Duc de Richelieu suggested, — prudent people, clever in handling themselves, and whose affairs have not ceased to run smoothly under the twofold impulsion of those two excellent motors, a beautiful wife and a beautiful mistress!

Ah! they are the shrewd fellows!

"It is certain that if I do not adopt that course, as the Duc de Richelieu, himself the cleverest of the clever, says; if I choose to despise my wife, to laugh at her and the king, to make a faction for myself among the sour old courtiers who snarl at virtue; if I wish to recast myself, and carry myself back to the last century, or rather to the years of Madame la Marquise de Maintenon, to be called Montausier, Navailles, Montespan, and to be blessed in the almanacs printed in Holland, — it is certain that if I carry the spirit of resistance to the point of undergoing exile, of presenting remonstrances to the king, and of asking justice at the hands of the queen, the *rôle* becomes superb.

"With a little tact, — and I have that quality, God be praised! — I can insult his Majesty with my broadside, conspire with Marie Leczinska against my wife, and arrange for a triumphal procession to the Bastille, escorted by all the unhappy and deceived husbands in the country, who will make of me their Cæsar or their Pompey.

"Then will come rehabilitation after exile, and a shower of dignities pouring upon my head after the Bastille, or at least a reputation that will cast into the shade all the conquerors of this overrated age.

"There 's another course open to me. No outcry, no scandal; a legal separation, which will be much more fitting for a man of delicate sensibility than this little rough draft of a divorce, which Louise and I entered into between ourselves; disinheritance of any so-called legitimate children who might be born; and all this arranged secretly and in due form. Thus I assure myself a life of tranquillity and full of honors. No one will laugh at the king, to whose will I shall have bowed. No one will laugh at me, for I shall have made my name respected. My wife will be no longer my wife; they will rechristen her, and call her the 'Well beloved of the well beloved.'

"What could be better than that?

"But no, no, never shall it be said that a French gentleman, when he has given his name to a woman, allowed himself to be forced to deny her. I, Comte de Mailly, have a wife by my own will, by the law civil and law canonical. King Louis XV. shall not take my wife from me; no, I do not choose that it shall be so!

"But Olympe, my mistress, — ah! that is another matter, unhappily. I have a mistress, but she is mine by no law, civil or canonical; and yet it is a right made sacred by custom. There has been no instance among the

nobility for a hundred years, of a man doing without a mistress.

"Yes; but if there is no instance of a man doing without a mistress, it is equally true that there is no instance of a woman doing without — "

At this point Mailly interrupted the flow of his own thoughts.

"What was I about to say?" he cried; "I am condemning myself out of my own mouth. Yes, that is unprecedented; but I — I, Comte de Mailly, will prevent it nevertheless. Let me also play at arbitrary conduct, since these other people are trying to monopolize it."

Thereupon Mailly, trembling with excitement and pale as a ghost, went into the house to get his sword; and without waking Olympe, who was sleeping soundly and peacefully, he was off at lightning speed for the Hôtel de Nesle.

Louise had returned comfortably in her carriage with the king's suite, lying back among her cushions, and alone with her thoughts.

She was in ecstasies over her memories of the preceding night. Filled with hope for the future, she had not ceased, after leaving Rambouillet, to pursue the pleasant dream which nascent love, free from restraint, always brings to vigorous youth.

It was not that the countess's thoughts had really carried her so far as Richelieu had gone. No. Being by nature modest and reserved, though open to such impulses as a well-placed passion might impart, Louise had not allowed her thoughts to wander among chimeras; she was confident that she had it in her to take advantage of any opportunities that circumstances might bring to pass.

She had resumed control of her hotel, as if Monsieur

de Mailly were not expected to return. In her eyes the whole past — the marriage, the nuptial blessing, administered in the presence of the families of Mailly and of Nesle — was an insignificant line of demarcation between the preceding and the following year, — nothing more.

The Comte de Mailly was no longer a factor in her calculations. The dreams of the present hour had driven her husband from her mind.

She had no bitter feeling, no feeling of enmity or hatred against him. If the count should present himself before her, she could call him her friend without reproaching her lips or her thought with falsehood.

As for the heart, we say nothing about that organ, as the heart counted for little in the relations between Monsieur le Comte de Mailly, Mademoiselle de Nesle's husband and Olympe de Clèves' lover, and Madame la Comtesse de Mailly, smitten with Louis XV.

Suddenly the count's presence was announced to her by the same maid whom we have seen smile at Bannière. Monsieur de Mailly had arrived at the hotel in hot haste.

She rose, astonished beyond measure, and looking through the window saw that he was indeed ascending the steps of the portico, apparently in great agitation.

A moment later he entered her room.

Louise uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"You!" said she.

"Yes, Madame, it is I."

The maid opened her eyes to their fullest extent, and there was even more curiosity expressed in them than in those of her mistress.

Monsieur de Mailly noticed her eyes in a mirror.

"Be good enough to dismiss Mademoiselle," said he.

The maid left the room, with her mind made up to

listen at the door. The count followed her with his eyes until the door closed behind her.

Then he turned to his wife.

"Well, Monsieur le Comte," said she, "what is the matter, and to what am I indebted for the unexpected pleasure of seeing you?"

"To a very serious reason, Madame."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* you frighten me!"

Mailly smiled bitterly; he thought that a bitter smile could not in any event do him any harm.

"Be seated, pray!" continued the countess; "am I sufficiently fortunate, Monsieur, to find myself, since yesterday, of some consequence to you?"

"You have become — indispensable to me."

This time it was Madame de Mailly's turn to smile.

"How can that be, *bon Dieu!* Tell me, I beg you."

"You have no suspicion of what brings me here?"

"Not the least; and so I am overflowing with curiosity."

"Madame, do you know what people are saying?"

"Where?"

"Everywhere."

"Tell me what people are saying everywhere; I am listening, Monsieur."

"Well, they say that the king — Ah! you are blushing already!"

"Monsieur, if you continue to stare at me in that fashion, I shall not only blush, but shall lose my color too. So I entreat you, Monsieur, to lay aside these lieutenant of police airs, and go on. What do they say of the king?"

"They say that the king — that the king —"

"Well, go on."

"That the king has cast his eyes upon a certain lady

with a view of passing with her such time as he does not pass with the queen."

"Aha! they say that, do they?" replied Madame de Mailly, much disturbed.

"Ah, you told the truth!" cried the count; "see how pale you are now, Madame!"

Louise rose.

"Monsieur," said she, "I have no clear idea what the object may be of this wretched comedy which you are performing for my benefit; but be good enough, before you carry it any further, to understand that it is not at all to my taste."

"Oh, Madame," said Mailly, "I beg you to accept a *rôle* in it."

"By no means, Monsieur. I am not in the habit of replying to things which I do not understand."

"Never fear, I will make myself understood. I will not be long. Those interested are desirous to know whether the person whom the king has chosen will accept his homage; and as you are acquainted with her, I am charged to ask your opinion."

"A deplorable business for a worthy gentleman, Monsieur, I should say. I am surprised, knowing you as I do, that you accepted it."

"Don't get excited, Madame, pray; you judge me too quickly. If I accepted the commission, be sure that I had my reasons for it."

"What were they, Monsieur?"

"I know the person too."

"Then do your errand yourself."

"Yes, I know her. You — you yourself are the one."

"I!" cried Louise; "it is I whom the king is after?"

She uttered these few words with such imprudent eagerness that Mailly, if he had been less blind than

he was, would have attributed her emotion to something besides anger.

"Yourself, Madame," he repeated.

For a few moments she was buried in deep thought.

"The thing is impossible," she said at last.

"Be good enough to believe that I have it on the best authority."

"Oh! whose?"

"It makes little difference. That is not what you want to know; you would like perhaps to be enlightened further."

"I don't understand you now."

"A husband who speaks out is always incomprehensible."

"But, Monsieur, you forget that you are not my husband!"

"A mere joke, Madame."

"What do you mean by a mere joke? How about our agreement?"

"Our agreement — our agreement," stammered Mailly, in much embarrassment; "oh, Madame, yesterday I played a game which it does n't suit me to play to-day."

"I must beg you to go on with what you have to say, in the hope that among all your words I may find one or two to give me some satisfaction."

"I have but little more to say. The king has his eye on you, Madame, so they say; and I presume that that is the explanation of all this sulking, and all the high and mighty airs which you have been inflicting on me for some time past."

"You charge me with sulking and with putting on airs?"

"Oh! of course you will deny it; such perfidious conduct is worth an attempt at an excuse, I suppose."

"Monsieur le Comte, you forget that you are speaking to a woman."

"I am not speaking to 'a woman,' but to my wife, which is a very different matter."

"Ah! but you did n't think of that yesterday."

"Agreed; but I think of it to-day, when there is a probability of my being made a laughing-stock by you. Yesterday my mind was occupied only with my unhappiness —"

"A subtle distinction, that!"

"A distinction which satisfies my argument; I make such use of it as I can. Come, Madame, if you are willing to receive the king's addresses, be so good as to tell me so."

"I could answer your question, Monsieur."

"That is all that I ask, Madame."

"I should be as discreet as you are foolish."

"Ah! you deny that the king —"

"I deny absolutely nothing, Monsieur; the king does as he pleases. Go and ask him, and he will answer you."

"A fine thing to do, that would be!"

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, you, who became free yesterday, beware! You presume altogether too much upon your freedom to-day."

"I, who became free yesterday, am to-day such as I choose to be to-morrow, and such as I shall always be. You are yourself responsible for this condition of things; you must take the consequences."

"Take the consequences, when they lead to dishonor?"

"Oh, Monsieur, we have not reached that point."

"Madame, let us go no farther toward it. I appeal to your probity; will it respond to the appeal?"

"Always! But, look out! a woman's probity finds expression in frankness."

"I accept the terms. Are you pleased with the king?"

"Greatly, Monsieur."

"There's frankness for you," cried the count, with a forced smile.

"You asked for just that, and I promised that you should have it."

"And you will be equally frank to the end?"

"To the end."

"I resume my investigations."

"Be careful!"

"Always the bird of ill omen. I am not weary of you, Louise."

"So much the better, blind man!"

"If the king should offer you his homage, what have you determined to do?"

"Monsieur, for pity's sake, don't force me to reply to such impertinent questions."

"You forget that I am a self-constituted ambassador, and that I have accepted your stipulation of perfect frankness."

"You insist, then?"

"I insist."

"Very well! Monsieur, I am free; I received an indirect dismissal from my husband, who took unto himself a mistress almost before I had had time to call him my husband. I am young, and am told that I am fair; I have a heart and eyes which belong to me, and since I am free, I shall avail myself of my heart and eyes."

"You will love another?"

"If I choose to, yes."

Exasperated by his powerlessness to deal with this extraordinary woman, who revealed her inmost thoughts to him so proudly, Mailly allowed his indignation to carry him to the point of threatening.

"Madame," he cried, with an angry gesture, "you had best beware yourself!"

"Count," said she, coldly, "your extravagance will put me wholly in the right, if I am not now."

Mailly was vanquished, and his outburst of temper was checked on his lips.

"I see," he resumed, after a moment's hesitation which enabled him to recover his wits, — "I see what reply I shall have to make. Madame, you love the king."

"True."

"Will you do me the honor to tell me since when it has been true, lest I learn it from the mouths of others? You must understand, Madame, that for me to learn it from others would be deplorable for us both."

"Monsieur," said the countess, with the same unruffled demeanor which had characterized her throughout the interview "I ceased to love my husband day before yesterday, and yesterday I began to love the king."

A flame of rage and despair — of jealousy, in short — blazed in the count's eyes.

Suddenly he seemed to grow calmer.

"Assure me that you are not joking," said he, in tones of the utmost mildness and melancholy. "I am sadly in need of that assurance, Louise."

He folded his arms upon his heaving chest.

"Monsieur, my heart is torn to be compelled to give you that assurance; it is no subject for joking, for sorrow entered my heart with that love."

"But shame and misery await you at the end of this passion which you dare to avow. Reflect seriously, Madame, I beg you."

"I have reflected."

"Then I will myself prevent you from rushing to your own destruction."

"I believe, Monsieur le Comte, that in so doing you would render me a valuable service; and yet you can see how far my frankness goes with you, — I honestly do not dare to ask you to assist me."

"Why not?"

"Because — must I confess it? — I believe I should curse your good offices."

"Marble heart!" muttered Mailly to himself. "In vain do I rend my soul in search of a soft and loving heart! Patience, patience! I was born to suffer; in all France there are no two women like Mesdemoiselles de Nesle and de Clèves, and it must needs be that I must lose them both."

With that his ideas became calmer, if not less painful; he bent before the countess's immovable will, and contented himself with saying,—

"Luckily, Madame, I am still your master, and in our respective positions a private agreement is binding upon neither of the contracting parties."

"You are in error, Monsieur le Comte; for if I have determined to listen to other men than you, I will make good use of this agreement which gives me my freedom. It may be void in the eye of the law, but it will carry the case against you before the tribunal of public opinion, the only one from which I have anything to fear. And now, if you have nothing else to say to me — "

With a queenly gesture she pointed to the door.

Mailly, completely crushed, bowed and left the room.

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